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QUINN'S
[illegible] E. MAIN

MOON OVER BROADWAY

BY
MARK HELLINGER

MOON
OVER
BROADWAY

1931
WILLIAM FARO, INC·
NEW YORK

Copyright, 1931
by
William Faro, Inc.

To

J. M. Patterson
A. J. Kobler
and
Frank Hause.
They all took a long chance.

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PROLOGUE

STATE OF MAINE EXPRESS

STATE OF MAINE EXPRESS

IN the baggage car, two men were talking. One was Pete Quillen, the Pullman conductor. The other was Steve Franklin, the baggage man. Steve was grumbling.

"I hate them damn corpses," he grunted. "They gimme the creeps. Me bein' in the baggage service so long, you'd think I'd be used to 'em by now. But am I? Not me. They still gimme the creeps."

Pete nodded.

"Me, too. I don't blame you. Sitting in this cold car in the dead of winter with a stiff for company. It's not so bad in the summer, I guess."

"It's bad enough," said Steve.

The conductor nodded.

"I guess it is."

He peered down the length of the baggage car as the train lurched around a curve.

"What kind of a stiff is this one?" he asked. "Fellow or woman?"

Steve shrugged his shoulders.

"That's what I'm squawkin' about. It ain't one this trip. It's two. An old guy and a young girl. The old guy goes off at Bangor. The dame gets switched off and goes through to Greenville."

The conductor whistled softly.

"Two this trip, eh?" he murmured. "Well, I don't blame you for feeling queer. Two stiffs at once, eh? Seems like you'd be used to it though, Steve. Me, I couldn't stand it. But it seems like you'd be used to it."

Steve nodded.

"Yeah. Lots of people would think that, I guess. But it's funny the feelin' that comes over you when you get alone with a stiff. It's a queer feelin', kind of.

"I get to thinkin' about things. For instance, the two stiffs in here right now. The girl must of been very poor 'cause her coffin is the cheapest kind of wood. The old guy, though, must of been very rich. He's got a casket the Pope, himself, would be glad to be in.

"After you leave an' I'm alone with the two of 'em, I'll get to thinkin' about 'em. I'll wonder who the hell they was and whether they was glad or sorry to die. And unless it's a real big shot, which don't happen often, I keep wonderin' until I slide 'em off—and I never find out anyhow.

"I can't tell you just what I mean, Pete, because you know I ain't so hot on words. But I can't help thinkin', Pete. I can't help thinkin'."

Pete walked to the door that would lead into the next car back. He didn't like the way Steve was talking. Hell, a man's job was a man's job. If stiffs entered the work every once in a while, wasn't Steve getting paid for it? Besides, a guy that felt squeamish about stiffs was nothing but superstitious. A stiff was a stiff—and what could a stiff do to you?

He opened the door. A chill blast came through. He shivered.

"Well, Steve," he said. "So long. I got to be going along. Don't get yourself too upset. A stiff can't hurt you."

Steve laughed.

"You said it, boy. I know that. But I can't help what I feel. Comin' back tonight for a coupla hands of pinochle?"

"No," replied Pete rapidly. "Too much work tonight. Well, see you soon. So long."

"So long," said Steve . . .

* * *

In car 14, drawing room A, were four members of the Ashford family. There were Tom and George and sister Mildred. The other man was Harry, Mildred's husband. All the men wore blue suits and black ties. Mildred was in deep mourning.

Tom and George were playing casino on a table that shook mightily as the train rumbled on. A half-filled bottle of William Penn, three glasses and some White Rock stood on the table near the window.

Tom dealt eight cards and raised his glass.

"Nuts," he cried. "This thing is warm again. What the hell's the matter with that nigger? Can't we get any ice on this train?"

He reached over and pushed a button vehemently. George played a king. Tom took the two of spades with the two of hearts.

"Lousy service on these trains," he said. "That's why I hate to travel. Lousy service."

Harry allowed a copy of Liberty to fall into his lap.

"I wonder if he left each child an equal share?" he mused. "Or whether he left Mildred more than the rest?"

George shifted about.

"And why should he leave Mildred more than Tom or me? Because you're her husband? A heluva reason that would be. And for Christ's sake, stop talking about dough. The old man is hardly cold yet. Mildred will give you what's coming to you. Don't you worry."

Mildred sniffled into a pretty handkerchief.

"I don't see how you can talk that way to my husband, George," she asserted. "Harry was always devoted to father. More so than you or Tom, if I may say so. He insisted that I have him to dinner at least once a week. Did you ever do that?"

"Nuts," said George before Tom could answer. "Can that stuff. The first thing you know we'll be having a family argument. Time enough for that when the will is read. Your play, Tom."

A slight knock and the door opened. The porter looked in.

"Somethin' yo' wanted?" he inquired.

George glared.

"Ice, buddy," he said. "We want ice. Ice. Get it. I-C-E. That spells ice. Bring us plenty this time so you won't have to work so hard. Come on now. Move. Wait. Here's a buck. Maybe that'll get me what I want."

The door closed.

"I build nines," muttered George. "No. Wait a minute. I forgot it was the last deal. I'll play the queen instead."

The train whistled for a crossing. A low, moaning whistle. Harry sighed.

"It isn't that I'm mercenary," he insisted. "It's just that I can't help wondering how he divided his money. He always was a queer old gentleman, you know. There's no telling what he might have done."

Mildred nodded.

"You're right, Harry," she observed. "There's no telling what he might have done. Father always was a funny man."

"Funny isn't the word for it," said Tom. "That gives me twenty-seven cards, George, and I'm out. I'm three up. Your deal."

He rolled the drink around in his glass and took a long swallow.

"Funny isn't the name for it," he repeated. "Pop made plenty of dough in the last twenty years. The will will show three millions, I guess. But did he ever enjoy himself? Not he.

"I must have called him at least five times and asked him to go to the races with me. But would he go? Not he. Said he didn't have enough money to throw away on things like that. Said he didn't like my Broadway friends.

"I never could understand pop in such things. There he was. All the dough in the world and not willing to invest a few bucks on the ponies. What sense does that make?"

There was a slight pause.

"I can understand that," said Mildred. "Father just didn't care for horse racing. Maybe it wasn't the money so much. Maybe. . ."

"You don't have to defend pop," George interrupted. "Tom is right when he says pop was a funny guy. And if pop was here, he'd be the first one to admit it.

"All his life, he was funny. Now that he's dead, he's funny too. What sense has this got—him insisting that he wanted to be buried in Bangor? Just because his father was buried up there. That's the nuts.

"What the hell's the difference where you're buried? The worms are just as fat in Bangor as they are on Long Island. Fatter, maybe. Pop knew that just as well as we do. But he just wanted to make a little trouble.

"Now we've got to meet relatives. Every Ashford in Bangor will be out in full bloom when the train pulls in. Hardly any of them have seen him in twenty years, but they'll all cry like hell just the same. If he died broke, there wouldn't be a tear.

"It's all the nuts, that's what it is. Whose play, Tom?"

Mildred brought out a new handkerchief. She ran her fingers over the black border and removed a small price label. Then she sighed again.

"Well," she murmured, "we're doing the very best we can. He has the finest casket that money can buy. He wanted Bangor as a burial place—and that's just what he's going to have. Tch, tch, tch. Oh, dear. Oh, dear. Poor father dead. It seems so strange to think of poor father dead. Oh dear, oh dear."

She wept softly into the new handkerchief. Harry placed a comforting arm about her. A short knock and the porter entered with a small bowl.

"Heah's yo' ice," he announced.

George looked into the bowl.

"Aw, nuts," he said. "It's not enough." . . .

* * *

In the only coach on the State of Maine express sat Mr. and Mrs. Milton, of Greenville, Maine. The coach was crowded. Yet Mr. and Mrs. Milton seemed absolutely alone.

"It's our own fault, pa," sobbed Mrs. Milton. "We should never of let her go. You were her pa. Why didn't you put your foot down before it was too late?"

"Mary dead," murmured Mr. Milton. "It doesn't seem possible. Seems like yesterday to me that she was born. And now she's dead. It doesn't seem possible."

Mrs. Milton wailed loudly. The other passengers turned around. Some of them looked uncomfortable. Mr. Milton put a protecting arm around her.

"There now, ma. Everybody's lookin' at you. Don't carry on so. After all, that ain't gonna bring her back. Mary's gone forever."

The woman gulped. She bit her lips forcibly. She was quiet for a minute. Then she talked again. More quietly.

"It was your fault, pa. You always was too easy. Always. It ain't as if you didn't know what New York was goin' to be like. You and I was married there—and you knew just what was gonna happen to Mary if we let her go there alone.

"Both of us was born in New York. You knew it was wicked. Did you think it was gonna change just 'cause we moved to Greenville? Did you?"

Mr. Milton attempted to argue.

"But listen, ma. Mary didn't die from nothin' wicked. The doctor said she died from pneumonia. That's nothin' wicked. Anybody can die from pneumonia."

"That's got nothin' to do with it, pa. How do you know what she was doin' down there? Runnin' around nights on Broadway, no doubt. Out all hours of the night and then tryin' to work in the store the next day.

"That's what brings on pneumonia, pa. You know it as well as I do. You had no right to let her go to New York."

Mr. Milton wiped his eyes and blew his nose violently.

"I could never say no to her, ma," he pleaded. "I was always crazy about her. Of the four, she was my favorite. Mary was the one I always was crazy about.

"When she wanted to go to New York and make her own livin', I just couldn't say no. She was such a sweet girl, ma. I didn't think no harm would ever come to her. I thought maybe God would look after that.

"You thought so too, ma. Don't say you didn't just because somethin' happened. When you got letters from Mary tellin' you how well she was doin' in the store, wasn't you proud? Didn't you show her letters to Mrs. Harmon and Mrs. Bierbauer? Didn't you?"

Mrs. Milton began to tremble again. Mr. Milton saw that he had talked too much. He clutched her closer.

"There now, ma. Don't carry on no more. After all, we got three more left."

The wife began to rock in her seat. She rubbed her eyes as though to push them back in her head. She was growing hysterical.

"Three more left," she screamed, "but Mary's dead. My little Mary. Dead and gone from this earth. Layin' inside in a pine box. We ain't even got enough to give her a decent casket. My Mary in a pine box.

"Oh, God. Oh, my good God!"

Mr. Milton gave up trying to comfort her. He cried too. Loudly and unashamed. The passengers looked more uncomfortable than ever . . .

* * *

In the baggage car, Steve Franklin walked to the rear of his domain. He looked down at the two coffins.

"Fine life, this bein' a baggage man," he muttered to himself. "Checkin' up on stiffs 'cause the law says so. Humph."

From a shelf on the side of the car, Franklin removed a well worn book and the stub of a pencil. Grunting to himself, he examined the claim checks that dangled from each coffin and made a notation in his book. First the beautiful casket, the best that money could buy. Then the plain pine box.

On the back of each of the two checks was the imprint of a rubber stamp. Both checks bore the same inscription.

"NO VALUE," it read. . .

BOOK ONE
MORNING

I.

A KINDLY OLD MAN

IT was the month of November, 1925. Things were very quiet in the office. The city editor peered around the room, rustled his papers and summoned me to his desk. He looked over some notes and finally drew forth a slip that seemed to suit his fancy.

"Mark," he said, "here's a little story for you to work on. You know John Watson, the actor?"

I nodded. Of course I knew John Watson. Everybody knew John Watson. Famous name in stage history. Why the devil shouldn't I know him? You'd know him too if I felt that it would be right to give you his real name.

"Certainly I know him," I replied. "Good actor, that guy. Getting a little old, though. What's the trouble with him?"

The city editor coughed.

"The usual thing," he replied. "He and his wife have had a split up. That's what the tip says anyhow. See if you can get him to admit it."

I shook my head.

"Doesn't sound reasonable," I asserted. "Watson is a man of sixty. He and his spouse have been married for thirty years. Even if the old buck was running around, why should the wife toss him out at this stage of the game?"

The city editor glared at me.

"Who's working this story?" he cried. "You or I? Don't ask me questions. Go out and find out what it's all about."

So out I went . . .

* * *

John Watson was a busy man. Not only was he appearing in a Broadway production but he was, at that time, doing a great deal of radio work. He was broadcasting from a Jersey station and, as Uncle George or Uncle Tom, or whatever name it was that he used, was a tremendous favorite among the children.

Watson went on the air at a certain hour three times a week. He must have been a great attraction, since the radio people catered to him as though he controlled the microphone patents. The kids, they tell me, were daffy about his voice and his funny little stories. They simply couldn't get enough of him.

I couldn't reach Watson until late that night. I finally caught him backstage at his theatre. I walked in as he was removing his make-up and he proved to be the very soul of courtesy.

"Well, my dear young friend," he said in that soft, mellow voice of his, "what is there that I can do for you?"

I looked at the 60-year-old actor.

"Mr. Watson," I chirped, "I hate to bother you with things like this, but it must be done. My paper has a story to the effect that you and your wife are about to be divorced. Is that true, sir?"

The actor turned sad eyes upon me.

"O, my dear young friend," he cried, "you have no idea how you pain me. To deny such a thing—even to speak of such a thing — is preposterous. Surely, sir, you must be making game of me?"

"No," I responded, "I'm on the level about this thing. And I want you to be, too. If it's not true, that's okay with me. But if it is, I want it. The paper needs news."

Watson arose and placed a hand on my shoulder.

"Son," he murmured, "let me ask you a question that has bothered me for some time. Just what is news?

"Three times a week I go across the river and broadcast to many kiddies. I get nothing for the work. I ask nothing for the work. For it is a work of love.

"I talk to these kiddies. I make them laugh and I make them happy. Thousands upon thousands of them listen to me. They love me—and I love them.

"Would you put that kind of a story in your paper? No, you know you wouldn't. Childish laughter doesn't mean very much to you, does it?"

I started to answer. But he raised his hand.

"On the other hand," he went on in that marvelous voice of his, "you come to me with something that you call news. You come and dare to ask me if there is anything but love between myself and that dear, sweet soul whom I have adored with all my heart for thirty years. That, to you, is news."

Tears glistened in his eyes. I gulped a bit myself.

"Look at me, son," he commanded.

I looked up.

"I'm a man of 60, my boy," he said simply. "I believe in human nature and I believe in you. You're sorry you asked me that question, aren't you?"

I nodded.

"Yes, Mr. Watson," I responded. "I am."

"I'm glad," he murmured. "I'm very glad."

I left. And when I reached the office again I told the city editor that his tip was all wrong and that John Watson was one of the finest men I had ever met . . . .

* * *

A week later Mrs. Watson sued John Watson for divorce. And she named three co-respondents! . . .

II.

FRONT PAGE

DURING the winter of 1917, a murder occurred in the city of New York. On 23d st., just off 10th av., a young woman was found beaten to death. She was neither pretty. Nor wealthy. Nor interesting. Just a woman —like millions of others.

On the arm of the murdered woman were some teeth marks. It was the only clue to the murderer. And the police kept investigating in order to find some one whose bite corresponded with the marks on the arm of the murdered woman.

They searched and they searched. And they finally located another woman named Mary who seemed to have a connection with the crime. They arrested her and allowed her to go hungry for a time. Then they gave her an apple. She was hungry. Eagerly grabbing the piece of fruit, she bit into it immediately.

When Mary had taken her first bite, the police seized the apple. They compared that mark with the wound on the dead woman's arm. The bites were exactly the same. So Mary, after a little more investigating, was held on a charge of murder.

And that's the first part of the story. . . .

* * *

In Auburn prison, at the time of the "apple murder"—as the case grew to be known—was a gentleman named Jimmy. He was, in the accepted sense of the word, not quite a gentleman. For he was serving a ten-year term for burglary. He had, it seems, been caught in the act of removing various articles from the home of a family with which he had not the slightest acquaintance.

For some two or three years, Jimmy had served faithfully his debt to society. Like a great many others he cracked rocks, or whatever it is that a prisoner does when he serves time in Auburn.

Early in 1918, however, Jimmy began to grow a trifle restless. He longed for the open spaces, where men aren't their brothers' keepers. He grew to hate the prison walls. And like many others, he began to lay plans to escape from the surroundings that did not attract him one tiny bit.

One spring day, while a game of handball was in progress, he turned to a pal of his.

"Frank," said Jimmy to his friend, "I'm getting sick of all this. I'm going to make a break. I've got to get loose. I'm going to get out of this joint within a week even if I get killed doing it."

His pal, Frank, shook his head with great deliberation.

"Don't be a fool, Jimmy," murmured Frank, "you haven't got a chance. Hold your horses. I'll think of something for you before the day is done."

So Jimmy, knowing that his pal was very wise, waited until the day was done.

That night, Jimmy met Frank again. He looked at him questioningly. And Frank spoke slowly and carefully.

"Jimmy," murmured Frank, "there's a dame in New York who's accused of bumping off another skirt. She's up for trial next week and the case is known as the 'apple murder.' The police haven't got much against her, and it looks as though she's got a pretty good chance to beat the case

"She may be guilty as hell—but that don't concern us. What you've got to do right now is to confess to that murder."

Jimmy glanced at his pal as though he had suddenly gone insane.

"What?" he yowled. "Me confess to a murder? Are you nuts or something?"

Frank smiled a knowing smile.

"Can't you see?" he cried. "You're only confessing this thing in order to get a chance to get out of this jail. If you convince them that you know something about this 'apple murder,' it's ten to one that they'll send you down to New York to testify.

"Once you get on the train, that will be your big chance. One of our dumb guards will probably be assigned to take you down. You get on the train with him, watch your opportunity, bang him on the nut and off you go.

"If you try to get out over these walls, you ain't got one chance in a million. The other way it's even money you make it. Get the idea?"

Slowly but surely, the idea crept into Jimmy's brain. The more he thought of the scheme, the more he liked it. He was doing ten years for burglary. This was a mighty swift way to lop off some seven years.

He asked for complete details on the "apple murder." They were given to him. And later that night, an Auburn convict sent a letter to the district attorney of New York and confessed to the murder of a woman whom he had never even seen. . . .

* * *

The scheme panned out even better than any one anticipated. The very next morning found three assistant district attorneys of the State of New York visiting Jimmy in Auburn prison.

They hurled question after question at him. But Jimmy stood his ground. He had been well coached on the case. And he knew the various angles just as well as the district attorneys themselves did. They finally left him and reported to their superior that this Auburn convict undoubtedly knew something about the murder.

This produced the desired result. Jimmy was ordered to New York for the trial. One of Auburn's dizziest guards was assigned to bring him to the city. His pal, who had suggested the plan, heard the news first. And he rushed to Jimmy's cell. Frank was a trusty—and had pretty much the run of the place.

"Great news, kid," he cried, "C——'s gonna take you down to New York. He's a pipe. You'll be a free man by this time tomorrow, if you watch your step. What do you think of it?"

Jimmy looked up from the paper he was reading. He seemed a different man from the convict of the day before. Very slowly, he handed the paper through the bars.

"Look at that, Frank," he said softly, "just look at it."

Frank looked down at the paper. It was the local Auburn newspaper. And on the very front page was a huge picture of Jimmy and a long story about him.

It painted Jimmy as a great man. He was going to save a little woman from the chair. He had confessed to the murder. His conscience was torturing him. He had resolved to tell all and take his medicine.

He was a hero. . . .

Frank looked at the paper and then at his friend.

"Hey," he cried, "you're not forgetting what you did this for, are you? Don't get the idea you're a hero and forget that you're doing this in order to escape. You ain't goin' dizzy, are you?"

Jimmy shook his head slowly.

"Nope," he murmured, "I ain't forgetting. But, gee, that's some picture, all right. And I'll bet it'll appear all over the country. Especially if I testify for that dame. It's too bad I can't testify."

Frank looked closely at his pal.

"Listen, kid," he cried, "something tells me that you're gonna pull an awful bone. I ain't gonna tell you nothing that you don't want to hear. But just watch your step. Get me?"

Once again Jimmy nodded.

"I'm watching my step," he said, "and I'll get away tomorrow on the train. But it seems like an awful shame that I can't get my picture in all those papers." . . .

* * *

The next day, Jimmy left Auburn in the keeping of C——. All the convicts who were in on the know made an eager grab for the afternoon papers. But there was no news that Jimmy had got away. There was no news that he had wrapped a bit of lead around his keeper's head and fled the train at a lonely station.

There was, however, other news of Jimmy. Moreover, the New York papers were using his picture in large cuts. And with them were lengthy stories about the young hero that was willing to sacrifice his life in order to save the life of a girl who was even then on trial for murder.

And, just as the papers stated, Jimmy was in the Tombs in New York City. He had made no attempt to flee. As a matter of fact, he had been as gentle as a little lamb. . . .

The end of the story is short and sweet. Jimmy testified for Mary. Day after day, the newspapers came out with his pictures. In spite of the fact that he had never even heard of the "apple murder" until his Auburn pal had told him about it, he stuck to his story.

This district attorney knew he was lying. So, too, did every one who was privileged to sit in the courtroom. But the jury must have put some stock in what he claimed. For the girl he had never seen was acquitted of the "apple murder" after an hour's deliberation.

Jimmy was through with the case. But he was not sent back to Auburn. Not just yet. For the district attorney was a mightily peeved gentleman. He visited Jimmy in the Tombs and assured him he would square accounts.

And he did. New evidence came in. The district attorney smiled with satisfaction. And Jimmy, himself, was placed on trial and charged with perjury.

The trial was short and sweet—for the district attorney. Jimmy was found guilty. And they gave him twenty years more in jail for lying to save the life of the girl. . . .

* * *

Thus, my friends, there is nothing more to be told in the story of the "apple murder." If you will take the trouble to look up the case, you'll find that Jimmy is still in Auburn. He has some fourteen years to go.

He would have been a free man today. But he chopped twenty years from his life in order to have his picture in the papers.

It may not be any consolation to Jimmy, but I'd like to tell him that he's not alone. There are many people like him. . . .

III.

LADIES WHO CHEAT

As a story of ladies who cheat, I don't think this yarn has ever been topped. It concerns two women in their early thirties who are married to two gentlemen of a similiar age. These two couples are intimate friends, and they have been seeing each other every day or so for several years.

One husband is a prominent physician who numbers many prominent theatrical celebrities among his patients. The other husband is a well-known song-writer—but people like him anyhow.

While their husbands were working, the two women had luncheon at the Ritz one afternoon, and were introduced to two young men whose names appear in the social register. Both boys were handsome—and their money was far greater than their brains. It was a new thrill to the two women, however, and the party that afternoon wound up in a little speakeasy in the fifties.

Within a month, there were several such afternoons. The two wives and the two boys were drifting into a dangerous stage of the game and the husbands, trusting their wives implicitly, never had the slightest idea of what their darlings were doing on those lonesome afternoons.

The society boys begged the women to join them for dinner one night in a home they maintained in Connecticut.

"Come on up with us," they pleaded. "We'll have loads of laughs and things. Phone your husbands and tell them you're going to visit a sick girl friend. Tell them anything. What say, girls? Adventure is calling."

The two women talked it over. They were talking it over, however, on four drinks. And that's a bad time to make any decisions.

"Let's go," urged one little wifie. "After all, if we go together, our husbands will never get wise. We'll phone and tell them we won't be home for dinner because we're visiting someone. We'll be home at eleven o'clock anyhow. Why not go?"

In the end, they went. They phoned their lies to their respective hubbies and piled into the boys' car. Two bottles of speakeasy brandy went along for company.

When they arrived at the house in question, things began to happen. It was much further than the boys had told them. Both women had been drinking too much. So had the boys. One of the women grew ill. A terrific storm came up and lightning struck a tree in front of the house. It was all very lovely.

When it was time to start back to town, one of the boys brought in the sad news that the car was out of commission. The women grew frightened and demanded that another car be hired at once. Whereupon the boys notified the girls that the nearest phone was ten miles away and that, since such a violent storm was raging, they would simply have to make the best of it.

Around three in the morning—the car having repaired itself as if by a miracle—the four of them started back to town. One woman was hysterical with fear. The other one sat and pondered the situation.

"My God!" shuddered the first. "What will we tell our husbands? Mine will divorce me. I know he will. What will we do? What can we say?"

The second one finally snapped her fingers.

"I've got it!" she exclaimed. "Our husbands both know

Broadway and they're both regular guys. Here's what we'll have to do.

"You tell your husband that I've been carrying on a secret affair with another man for several months. Say you went along with me today to meet the other man because I urged you to. Swear your husband to secrecy and act as you have never acted before.

"I'll do the exact same thing. Except, of course, that in my story you will be the bad woman in the case. Each one likes the other too much to spill the bad news. The thing will work. I just know it will."

And it did. When the women arrived home that night, each found her husband almost frantic. Each one told her noble story of how she protected the other woman. And each husband, being a wise guy of Broadway and knowing everything there is to be known, believed his wife.

Today, the husbands love their wives more than ever because of the great sacrifice they think that each one made. And neither husband will speak to the other about the incident because each one likes the other too much to hurt him.

"Poor fellow," says one husband when he is alone with his wife. "I feel sorry for him. He doesn't even dream that his wife is being unfaithful to him."

Whereupon the wife puts her arms around him.

"There, there," she comforts him. "It's all for the best that he shouldn't know. Isn't it, dearest?"

And the husband agrees. . . .

IV.

THEY BOTH SCALE BARS

GEORGE and Joan were married back in 1910. He was a comedy tumbler. She was a singer in small-time vaudeville. They met in Chicago. He bumped into her as he was coming off the stage. They argued and he almost took a punch at her. It was a case of love at first sight. Two weeks later they became man and wife in a small Wisconsin town.

For six months or so, these two were in love. She was his Joan. He was her George. They came east—to Broadway. Agents gave her a tryout. She caught on overnight. In a short while she was a sensation. And George, the tumbler, could get no work.

It was the old, old story. You really can't blame the woman. Success brought her many new acquaintances. She grew tired of supporting a husband who tried hard but could find no work.

A year after they first arrived on Broadway together, George and Joan were divorced. . . .

* * *

Today, in the vicinity of any newspaper plant, there are many speakeasies. A number of them are frequented by reporters and printers. Some are fairly decent places. And some are the lowliest dives in America.

Strange characters hang around most of the cheaper joints. Bleary-eyed gents with more gravy on their clothes than on ten Ritz-Carlton steaks. Wandering misfits on the place called earth. Tattered, torn and sickly, they are drunk when they arise in the morning and drunker when they fall into bed at night.

Most of these men are beggars. Some haunt the saloons and beg for drinks. Others stand on corners and ask passersby for "just enough money to get over to Jersey."

I often feel that the reason so many of these rumhounds ask for enough money to get to Jersey is because, when they have collected enough, they stand against bars, pick up their drinks and say "Over the river." . . . .

Among these poor unfortunates is an ex-tumbler who answers to the name of George. It is many years now since he was divorced from Joan. Year by year, he has slipped lower in the scale of existence. From coast to coast, his ex-wife is known as an able songstress. Yet here is her ex-husband. They both scale bars—but on different planes.

"Buy me a drink, mister?" he will whine. "Just a little drink. You'll never miss it Look, mister, I'll tumble for you."

And over he will go in a poorly executed somersault. Sometimes, when he is too drunk, he will fall in a heap on the floor. Sometimes they will throw him out as soon as he enters the saloon. If they do, he will stand outside and talk to the thirsty customers as they approach the door.

"Take me in with you, will yuh, mister?" he will cry. "If you will, I'll tumble for you. I just want one drink, mister. Will you?"

And to show that he means what he says, he will tumble for the customers right then and there. In all the slime and the dirt he will turn his feeble somersault. For that is all he knows. . . .

* * *

I spoke to a bartender about him one night.

"Sure," cried the bartender, "I feel sorry for that rummy sometimes. He's not a bad guy but he can't last much longer. He was the husband of Joan, you know. Sure. They was divorced back in 1912. O, sure.

"Funny thing about that, too. He always swears she's comin' back to him. O, sure. Says she still loves him. That's the only thing that makes him hold on, I guess.

"No matter what you tell him, he won't listen. All he keeps sayin' is that Joan'll come back to him some day. He's sure of it.

"Poor guy." . . . .

A short time after, in the Texas Guinan club, I met Joan. She was with her third husband. I drew her aside. And I asked her if she ever heard from George.

With the mention of that name, she started as if she had been shot. Her fists clenched. Silence for a moment. Bit by bit she drew herself together. Then she spoke.

"I'm sorry," she responded evenly. "I don't know whom you mean. I never heard of him."

She bowed slightly and resumed her seat. When I looked at her again some twenty minutes later, her eyes were still frightened. . . .

* * *

So George is wrong. Joan is never coming back. But he is going away. . . .

V.

THE DAME ON THE SEVENTH FLOOR

HE was a man of no particular rarity. His life, like that of countless others in this city, was strangely the same—hour after hour and day after day. Born of poor parents, he had entered the cotton business as soon as he graduated from high school. When he was twenty-one, he married. At the age of thirty-eight, he had three children and a wife who grew stouter and more nagging with each passing year.

His income, while not tremendous, was more than sufficient for his needs. He carried $30,000 life insurance. His home life was so evenly regulated that it fairly cried aloud for a bit of hellishness.

During the winter he attended the movies once a week and a Broadway theatre once a month. When summer rolled around and he felt hot and uncomfortable, his wife took the children and went to the mountains.

Respectable, that's what he was. Very respectable. The same days. The same nights. He sensed a certain restlessness. He didn't know what it was.

If you had told him it was unhappiness, he would have laughed at you. . . .

* * *

While lunching one noon he met Margie. It wasn't a flirtation, really. It was just that she was so pretty and was sitting right across the table from him. He had his paper open and it accidentally knocked over her glass of water. He apologized. She said it was nothing at all.

Then she smiled again. And he smiled. Then they talked about the weather. Soon they were talking about Margie. She was a cloak model, she said. Been in New York just a short time and didn't have many friends. He felt sorry for the poor kid.

The following noon he met Margie again. And again the next day. And again on the next. He was happier now. The day seemed to move faster. Margie's face was continually before him.

Soon there was a night on Broadway. Margie took him to a cabaret where she said she had been once before. There were girls who danced before him in scanty clothes. And there was the gin that Margie kept pouring into his glass. He thought that Margie drank too much. And he told her so, too.

"Maybe, honey," she had responded, looking deep into his eyes, "it's because I'm in love for the first time in my life. I'm so much in love that I'm unhappy. Don't ask me with whom. Maybe I don't want to say."

His heart beat wildly. He knew it was he of whom she was speaking. He pressed her hand tightly—and took another drink. He, too, was in love. . . . . .

Some two months later, he was a constant visitor at Margie's apartment. He knew now that he was mad about this girl. When she was in his arms, he was content. This was love. Real love.

When he thought of his home and his wife, he hated them both. Not a drop of gin around the place. Too damned respectable. His wife was fat and dumpy. And stupid, too. Nagging all the time. What fun could he have with her in a cabaret or a theatre? None. Absolutely none. But Margie —ah, she was different!

In the back of his mind was the thought that he would get a divorce and marry Margie. This was the only happiness for him.

Still, he was cautious. Nobody knew of his affair. Even the elevator boy in Margie's house knew nothing about it. Margie lived on the seventh floor—and he always rode to the ninth and walked down to her apartment. He was doing it more for her sake, he told himself, than for his own. It wouldn't do to have people talk about this sweet kid.

Coming down from the ninth floor one night the elevator boy looked at him. The boy stopped the car and asked him if he'd like to have a little fun. The man in love asked what was meant by fun.

"O," responded the boy, "there's a dame on the seventh floor who's always glad to entertain a gentleman. You know what I mean"—and here he gave a knowing wink—"plenty of gin and all that. I've steered plenty o' guys up there an' they all said everything was jake. Want me to interdooce you?"

Smilingly, the man in love asked for the number of the apartment. Suddenly he fell back. His eyes widened with horror. A strange choking sound came from his throat.

The boy had mentioned the number of Margie's apartment.

* * *

Two hours later the police entered Margie's apartment. Both Margie and the man in love were dead. There had been a struggle. The man had shot her and then killed himself. The case was clear.

Two of the reporters talked it over outside the door.

"I just came from the dead guy's house," said the first. "It's a shame. Got a nice wife, three kids and a pretty home. Too bad. I guess Broadway got him."

"Yeah," agreed the second. "Guess Broadway got him." . .

VI.

IN A GARDEN

THE man, so the story goes, was an actor. He was never a great actor. Neither was he one of the worst. Just an in-betweener like so many thousands of others. He wanted, of course, to become a star. But this was merely a portion of what he wanted to accomplish.

His great ambition was to write a play. A great play. A thrilling play. A play that would live.

When he was 21, he made up his mind to write his play. He sat in his dressing room one night, took a pad of paper and sharpened a pencil. Then he began.

"Act 1, Scene 1," he wrote. "In a garden——"

He looked at what he had written. He began to wonder. Perhaps he did not know enough about life just yet to write this great play. Perhaps it would be wiser to wait just a bit longer before beginning his masterpiece. After all, he was really very young.

So he waited. . . . .

* * *

At the age of 35, he had been married seven years. Happily, too. He and his wife often talked of the play he was going to write. He was still gathering material, you see.

It had been some time now since he had had an engagement. His wife came to him one morning and asked him why he did not write the play.

"You have time now," she said. "Why not start at once? You have it all inside of you. Why not write it?"

He nodded.

"It's a good idea," he cried. "Get me some paper and I'll begin at once. I have plenty of material now. I'll startle the world with this play."

He sat down and began to write.

"Act 1, Scene 1," he wrote. "In a garden——"

Just then a telegram arrived. If he caught the midnight train, there would be a part awaiting him. An engagement at last! He smiled happily and told his wife to pack his bag. She did so.

"As soon as I get this new part," he told her as he kissed her good-by, "I'll start to work on my play. Right now we need the money and this engagement comes in mighty handy. I'll begin the play next week." . . . .

Ten years later his wife died. Just before the end, she clasped his hand.

"I feel," she said softly, "that I will not linger much longer. I want you to do one thing for me—and for yourself."

He looked into her eyes.

"I want you to promise me, dearest," she continued, "that you will write your play very soon now. You know just what you're going to write and you'll do a very great play. Promise me, dear. Promise me."

His hand gripped hers tightly. He nodded.

"I promise."

After the burial, he returned to his home. He sat down before the table and drew forth a sheet of paper. His wife had made a last request. He was going to make good. He was going to write his play.

"Act 1, Scene 1," he wrote. "In a garden——"

He put down his pencil. He could not think. He tore up the paper.

"Can't write now," he told himself. "Can't because I'm thinking of her. I'll start tomorrow. Tomorrow without fail." . . . .

In a corner of the Lambs club some twelve years later, an elderly man with white hair sat with a pencil in his hand. Suddenly his head drooped and he slumped across a table. Two young actors noticed him.

"Look at the old codger," said the first, nudging the other. "He's fallen asleep. Let's go over and awaken him."

They walked over and shook the man with the white hair.

"Get up, old boy," cried the second actor. "This is no place to sleep."

They soon found out that the man was in a sleep from which he would never awaken. When the doctor arrived he said the man was dead.

They lifted him up. The pencil was gripped in his hand and they had to pry it loose. As they carried him away, a piece of paper fell from the table. He had been writing on it.

"Act I, Scene I," were the words he had written. "In a garden. . . ."

VII.

SUCCESS

THE girl was born about twenty-four years ago. Born into a German family that never knew what it meant to enjoy any sort of luxury. Enough to eat. Enough to drink. Enough to put a few pennies in the bank at the end of every struggling week. And beyond that—nothing.

When the girl was about twelve years of age, the mother died. The father was a broken man. His health suffered. For a time it looked as though the girl would be without both parents. But the old man finally pulled through.

He insisted upon working. And working hard. He moved to a small flat in Brooklyn where the rent was extremely low. And he worked twelve and fourteen hours a day.

"You see," he explained to his friends, "my child is yet such a baby. I want she should have school every day until she has a very good education. Maybe, if my strength holds out, she even goes to college.

"I never had such things—but I want my baby to have them. I want she should enjoy life the way her papa never could. I want that, if her mamma looks down and sees her, she is proud to say it is her daughter. Am I so foolish?"

When the girl was seventeen, she was in the beginning of her fourth year in high school. She led the average life of such a girl. The gossip of the neighborhood. Much thought about boys. A party whenever possible. Palisades Park once a week in the summertime. The neighborhood theatre once a week in the winter. And once in two months or so the greatest of all thrills—a Broadway show.

It may seem strange, but it was the Church that finally shaped the entire career of this girl. The boys and girls of the parish formed a junior league and decided to give a show for charity. They had a great deal of fun in handling the arrangements—and don't think for a moment that they weren't deadly serious about the thing. Nobody is more serious than the amateur actor. Except, of course, the amateur lover.

They came to the girl and asked what she would do. She shrugged her shoulders.

"What can I do?" she asked.

They told her she could do anything she wished.

"Well," she replied with a giggle, "my voice is kind of squeaky. But I'll try and sing. Will that be all right?"

They told her they hoped so. So, when the amateur production took place some four months later, the girl sang in public for the first time in her career. . . .

* * *

In the vestryroom the night of the show was a young chap who was already on the stage. He was quite the star of the neighborhood. He wore loud vests and louder spats and he danced in a vaudeville act—when the act was working. The very fact, however, that he was on the stage was enough for the rest of the mob. He was, my friends, a real hero.

As the show unfolded, the actor sat back with a bored expression on his map. Huh! Amateurs, no less! He never moved his hands. They didn't expect a real actor to applaud amateurs, did they?

But when the girl stepped out, the boy leaned forward. His eyes lit up. He nudged his neighbor.

"Who's the dame?" he inquired.

He was given the information. He heard her sing. And he shook his head.

"She ain't got much of a voice," he opined when she was through, "but she certainly is cute. Maybe I could do something for her."

That night he took the girl home. . . .

The boy put the stage germ into the girl's head. Before a week had passed, he had convinced her that she had the makings of a great star.

"You're a cinch for the big dough, kid," he told her, "and I'd like to take you down to my agent. Besides all that, I'm goofy about you. You like me a little bit too, don't you?"

The girl nodded. She was already getting wise to show business. She had learned to say yes. . . .

Instead of going to school, the girl met the boy downtown one morning and went the rounds with him. When she came home, she told her father what had happened.

"I'm going on the stage, papa," she asserted. "I know you're gonna think it's funny, but I guess I know my mind. I'm quittin' school right away. I think I'll have a job in an act by the end of the week."

The father tried to argue.

"I've worked so hard," he cried, "so that you should have an education. I slave all the time so you should go to the college. What good has it all been now?"

It didn't do him any good. The girl's mind was made up. She walked from agent to agent until she finally landed a job. As soon as the job was hers, the boy who had tried to help her met her on the street. She nodded and passed him by.

He clenched her arm.

"So that's the kind of a dame you are," he muttered. "Givin' your old friends the big head already?"

The girl shook his hand from her arm.

"You'd be surprised," she remarked coolly. "You're nothin' but a ham dancer and you ain't goin' no place. I got somethin'."

Friends told her father he was a fool. He was working very hard now. Because he was still trying to help the girl. There were costumes to get. And pretty dresses. The girl had to look well. She was an actress.

"Don't you see?" he told his friends, "I just got to help her. Maybe she isn't doing just the right thing—but she's still my daughter. And maybe when she gets this nonsense out from her head, she goes back to school."

So he continued to work. And work. And work. . . .

* * *

That girl never went back to school. Perhaps it isn't exactly justice, but the girl today is one of the most famous figures on the American stage. After a year of vaudeville, she went into a chorus. After a while, she led a number. Then two numbers. And then—success.

Her voice is a squeaky kind of a thing, but it's something new. The public never heard anything like it before and the girl jumped into national prominence almost overnight. Her salary today is in excess of $5,000 a week and she puts it all away.

She doesn't see her father any more. She doesn't want people to know about him. He's a porter in Brooklyn theatre and his salary is $17 a week. . . . .

VIII.

JAKE

UNTIL two years ago, Jake lived in an old tenement on Houston St. With him was his daughter, Dorothy. His wife had long since gone. Dorothy was his only child—and, for all the world knew, his only relative.

Jake was not the modern, aggressive, American Hebrew. Far from it. He was of the old school. A quiet, easy going soul, he was content to live on the meager wages he received as the bookkeeper of an East Side sweatshop.

His daughter was the entire world to him. The child was only four years of age when her mother died—and Jake had been both parents to her from that day on. Everything in his limited power he did for Dorothy. His every thought was only for her.

When she was twelve years of age he sat her on his lap.

"Dorothy," he said, "you're getting to be a big girl. The first thing I know, you'll be coming home and telling papa that you've fallen in love with a handsome man."

The child tittered. And Jake caressed her tenderly.

"You laugh now," he went on, "but it will be no joke to papa when that day comes. One must look to the future, you know."

Again the child laughed. But her father shook his head.

"Yes, my child. One must look toward the future. And that's what I'm doing for you, my darling. I'm putting money away for you. Yes, I am. When it comes time for you to marry, you are going to get a dowry of $2,000!

"That $2,000 will be yours. You will see."

The child threw her arms around his neck.

"Don't talk of such things, papa," she cried. "The money will always be yours because I will never marry. I hate boys."

Jake nodded wisely.

"The mind changes with the years," he observed. "But that's neither here nor there. You are to have $2,000 as a dowry from your father. This, on your twelfth birthday, he promises you."

Her father had no $2,000. It was a hundred to one that Jake would never have $2,000. But he liked the words as he spoke them. And after all, this child's marriage was so many years away. . . .

* * *

Each year, with no more money than he possessed the year previous, Jake made the same promise on Dorothy's birthday. Soon she was sixteen. And seventeen. And eighteen. And then—

Jake suddenly realized that his baby was on the verge of matrimony. She had been keeping company for almost a year. The boy was a fine youngster and Jake admired him. It was practically understood that Dorothy was engaged. Any day, it might be decided to set a date for the marriage.

Now it dawned upon him that he had to get the $2,000 he had promised for so long a time. Could he tell his daughter that he had no such sum? Could he tell her that his big remarks were the words of a big bluffer? Could he fail her now? No. He had brought this situation upon himself. And he would have to find the money somewhere.

He tried to borrow. His friends laughed at him. He went to a loan company. When they learned his salary, they offered to lend him $200 instead of $2,000. Where was he to turn?

The word spread rapidly. Old Jake was broke and needed money badly. And one night, as he walked slowly homeward from the sweatshop, another man was by his side. The other man was talking plainly.

"I know you're a right guy, Jake," said the man, "and that's why I'm giving you this chance. If you need a little dough, I can fix it for you.

"A few of the boys want to grab your firm's payroll. All you have to do is to give us the proper layout. We'll stage the thing and nobody will ever know that you had any connection with it. And your end will be ten per cent of the haul. What do you say?"

In all his life, Jake had never done a wrong thing. He shook his head doggedly and said he would have no part of such a scheme. The other man shrugged his shoulders.

"Okay, Jake," he asserted, "but we won't call it quits just yet. Think it over for a while. I'll meet you again in a few days and maybe your mind will change. So long."

The seed was planted. Jake shivered when he thought of it—but he thought of it through two sleepless nights. After all, no one would ever know. He could give his Dorothy her dowry. He could—

Three days later he met the other man again.

"I'll give you the information," said Jake nervously, "but there is one thing that stands in the way. The payroll is only $12,000 and I need more than $1,200. Will you give me $2,000 instead? I must have $2,000."

The crook nodded rapidly.

"Sure, Jake," he replied. "Glad to do it for you. And glad you're in with us on this cinch dough. Come on over to my house and we'll go over this thing."

And over they went. . . . .

Jake's portion of the job was soon completed. He gave the boys all the details. It was agreed that the spot was to be taken on the very next pay day. And Jake was permitted to leave.

As soon as he had gone, one of the mob complained.

"Why give that old sucker two grand?" he grumbled. "He ain't doin' nothin' to earn it."

"Aw, go easy, "muttered another. "If he don't get it, he'll beef on the whole bunch of us. We gotta pay him."

The leader smiled.

"We never 'got' to do anything," he observed. "Maybe I have a little plan. You just leave it to me." . . . .

On the appointed day, and at the apointed hour, the robbery took place. It went off smoothly and the $12,000 payroll was stolen in a very thorough manner. But both the police and the newspapers believed that the job was done by amateurs.

They had reason for their belief. According to them, the leader of the mob had become nervous during the hold-up and had killed an old Jewish bookkeeper named Jake R————, merely because the old man had happened to look toward the drawer in which the money was kept. . . .

* * *

Jake received a burial that was fitting for a man who had loved his daughter and who had devoted the greater part of his life to serving one firm. Moreover, although he had been a nobody in life, he was recognized in death as a fine man and a brave one.

A year went by and Dorothy prepared to marry the man she loved. Just before the wedding, her father's concern held a meeting. They arrived at a decision. And they sent Dorothy a note.

"In memory of your father's bravery," it read, "and as a token of our esteem for his services, we want you to accept the enclosed."

Although he never knew it, old Jake had made good. The enclosed was a check for $2,000. . . .

IX.

FAR FROM BROADWAY

WELL, this being a good place for it, it seems there was a damsel who kicked very prettily in one of the Ziegfeld shows. She was not of the ordinary run—because she came from a good family and had plenty of breeding. But the family was in reduced circumstances and when the kid expressed a desire to go upon the stage, both father and mother agreed that it might not be a bad idea.

So out went girlie and landed with Ziegfeld. In no time at all, she was part and parcel of the stage atmosphere. But not in the wrong manner. Not only was the kid highly intelligent, but mamma was always around to spread advice.

"Of course, my dear," mamma would say, "I want you to rise as high as you can in your profession. But I want you to be very careful in your dealings with men.

"When you fall in love, be sure that you are falling in love with the right man. In the show business, you'll be introduced to all types of tinhorn sports. You'll meet gangsters and gunmen. Be careful of such people.

"When you meet the man you want to marry, neither father nor I will stand in your way. But never look for such a man in any part of the show business. Find him as far away as possible."

The kid didn't forget that advice. She met plenty of gunmen and phonies—but that's as far as it went. Accordingly, while she developed the reputation of being slightly high hat, she was never in any trouble. And the last is far more important than the first.

For some sixteen months our little heroine played in the same show. Then it closed for the summer. And the girl, feeling that she had earned a vacation, picked out a small town in the middle west for a two weeks' rest.

Why the small town? Well, not only had her mother been born there, but it was a very peaceful little spot that nestled in the hills. It sounded very attractive to the chorine. So off she went one sunny morning.

Off she went. Far away from the phonies and gunmen of Broadway. . . .

* * *

The small town made plenty of fuss over her. Here was a famous Ziegfeld gal, by golly—and the daughter of one of their very own. They gave parties in her honor and every boy in the place forgot his own sweetie for the time being. The other girls didn't like that so much, but they couldn't be rude to a Ziegfeld beauty, could they? Of course they could—but they didn't know it.

At any rate the girl was having the time of her life. Before three days had elapsed, she felt like the Queen of Sheba. And then—before she knew what had happened to her—she fell in love.

With a thud that made her heart pump wildly, the little lady met THE man. He wasn't too young. As a matter of fact, he wasn't far from forty. But to the young girl he was the most fascinating creature she had ever met.

His hair was gray at the temples. His eyes were soft and carried a world of wisdom. He was one of the town's biggest business men and they whispered that he was worth a million or more. And, most important of all, he was single.

The kid said nothing to the man. She couldn't very well do that. After all, it was a case of love at first sight—and there was just a chance that he might be short-sighted. So, aside from making slight advances that even the man, himself, didn't notice, the girl contented herself with dreaming about him.

Funny, she thought to herself, that she should find the one man in this tiny spot. She had met so many men on Broadway. So many handsome men. So many phonies. So many gunmen. But none of them had meant a thing because of what her mother had told her.

You see how wise her mamma was? . . . .

* * *

On the fourth night of her vacation, there was a dinner party for the gal. She was quite the guest of honor, in spite of the fact that all of the big shots for miles around were also present. And present too was the handsome gentleman who had knocked her heart for a loop.

The dinner was very interesting to the girl—which is very unusual for any dinner. They placed her beside the best lawyer in the county, and he amused her mightily with tales of his experiences.

"You've been very interesting," she told him toward the close of the meal. "We don't hear such tales on Broadway very often."

The lawyer smiled.

"I suppose not," he replied.

The girl wrinkled her brow.

"I wonder if I might ask you a question?" she murmured. "I've been wondering about it for some time and I never had the opportunity to ask anyone."

"Certainly," responded the attorney. "Ask me anything you wish. I'll be only to happy to answer you if I can."

"Well," said the girl, "this is what has puzzled me: Are you, as a lawyer, compelled to defend a man even though you know he is guilty?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"That's a question I hear very often," he smiled, "and the answer is yes. If the State assigns you to defend a man in a murder trial, you must do your best to free him even though you feel certain he is guilty. That's the law.

"As a matter of fact, I once had just such a case. It was my first case in this county. I was picked as the lawyer for a man charged with murder. He was as guilty as a man could be. But I fought for him. And they believed me. He was freed—and I had won my first case in this county.

"Does that answer your question?"

The girl nodded. They both arose. The dinner was over. . . .

* * *

An hour or so later, it was time to leave. The girl had forgotten all about lawyers and such. She had maneuvered herself into a spot beside the handsome man of her choice and he had asked to escort her home. The little lady knew her onions.

They climbed into his car after the usual goodbyes and drove off. The girl murmured that it was early. So they drove through the hills for awhile.

The man attempted to make conversation as the girl removed her hat and slid closer to him.

"You were sitting next to lawyer G—— during dinner," he stated. "Splendid man, isn't he?"

"Wonderful," replied the girl enthusiastically. "I think he's grand. Do you know him very well?"

The handsome man gazed straight ahead.

"Yes," he murmured. "As a matter of fact, I was his client in his first case in this county." . . .

X.

WHAT DIFFERENCE NOW?

FORGET it," he said slowly. "After all, what difference can it make now?" . . . .

* * *

Back in 1915, Jack was a happy man. And with good reason. He was a successful comedian and his wife was one of the most beautiful women in all show business. On the stage she was his partner as well as his wife.

These two were featured in many revues. They played for Ziegfeld in several Follies. And Jack, in eccentric make-up, shared billing with the stars.

Who, then, will deny this man's good fortune? When you are successful in show business, have a wife you adore and are able to be with her both on the stage and off, there isn't much more you can ask. Jack, it seems to me, had been favored by whatever gods hover over the Broadway scene—if any.

For five years Jack and his wife drifted along in a most contented fashion. Suddenly, early in 1920, Jack noticed a change in his wife. For the first time since their marriage she began to accuse him of having affairs with other women.

"I saw you looking at that chorine this afternoon!" she would cry. "What's the big idea? And I heard a story the other day about the night we opened in Pittsburgh and you went out to that party. Who do you think you're kidding?"

At first Jack was inclined to laugh away these accusations. He was in love, you see, and he felt certain that his wife's petty jealousies were caused by her love for him. As a matter of fact, he was totally innocent of any wrongdoing—strange as that might seem for a featured comedian.

"Aw, honey," he would say, "don't be a baby. You know I love you and you must know that no other woman in the world means a thing to me. Stop clowning."

But his wife wouldn't stop. She became a worse nag than ever ran in a selling race at Belmont Park. Continually she picked on him. Their act was beginning to suffer. He finally did the only thing possible under the circumstances.

"Dearest," he told her one morning after another of her tirades, "I think it's best that we part for a week or so. I love you a great, great, deal—and, maybe, after we've been separated for a while, you'll realize that you have made a mistake."

So Jack moved to a hotel. He knew he was acting for the best—but his wife had other ideas. She took it for granted that he had moved away in order to have more freedom. She told him so, too. But Jack merely shrugged his shoulders. He was past the arguing stage.

The first night away from his wife was hell for Jack. This was the first time in five years she was not by his side. A hundred times he reached for the telephone—and a hundred times he changed his mind. They played the show together the next night, but they did not speak offstage.

That second night was too much for Jack. He was lonesome, miserable, frightened. He wanted his wife. What was the use of all this silliness? At three in the morning he arose and dressed himself. His mind was made up. He was going home...to the wife he loved.

He taxied across the town. His heart beating high, he took out his keys and opened the door of his apartment. He would steal in very quietly and take her in his arms.

He tiptoed across the parlor and slowly opened the door of his wife's room. His world of dreams crashed upon him. From his lips came a bitter cry of pain. His nails dug deep into his palms.

His wife was with another man! . . . .

* * *

He divorced his wife. On the day the decree was granted they met in court. He looked at her through troubled eyes.

"You've done a terrible thing," he said. "And you'll be sorry for it. Wait and see."

The beautiful one offered a gesture of contempt.

"You brought it all on yourself," she cried. "If you had been square with me all this wouldn't have happened. You were the first one to cheat."

Jack sighed. What use now, he felt, to argue further? What good were denials?

"Feel any way you wish about it," he responded tiredly. "But some day you'll be sorry."

She laughed. Merrily.

"You're a heluva comedian," she said lightly. "You talk like the third act of an Al Woods melodrama. So long, kid."

She left the courtroom on the arm of the other man. . . .

The business of eating must go on. In due time Jack found a new partner. Not as pretty as his ex-wife, but an attractive foil nevertheless. They played the country in Jack's old act. He missed his ex-wife greatly, but he never bared his heart to any one.

In 1922 he asked his new partner to become his second wife. She accepted. They were married. Some time later Jack's wife gave birth to a little girl.

This kid was Jack's heart of hearts. With that baby in his arms he succeeded in wiping out the memory of his first —and greatest—love. The thought of that one horrible night faded from his mind. He was happy once again.

Came a cabled offer from London, offering him a starring engagement as a single in England. It was a splendid offer, with much money involved. Jack showed it to his wife.

"I ought to take it, dear," he explained. "But I'm afraid to travel with the baby just yet. She's so young. Do you think it will be all right for us to go?"

She placed a hand upon his arm.

"Let's not chance it, Jack," was her reaction. "I think you should certainly go. But not baby.

"Take it, dearest. After all, you'll only be gone for eight or ten months—perhaps not that long. I'll be busy with baby. And when you get back, we can start out in the act again. You. And baby. And I."

Jack saw the wisdom of his wife's viewpoint. In the end he sailed for London. . . .

Jack scored great triumphs in England; the greatest, undoubtedly, of his entire career The English took kindly to his nonsensical antics and he could have remained in the country as long as he wished.

In this particular case, however, success meant nothing to him. He wanted to be back with his wife and—most of all—his baby. Letters came to him. Many of them. And all of them wound up with the baby's scrawl where her mother had guided the child's hand across the paper.

For six months, he played. Seven. Eight. Letters from his wife asked about his return. She seemed anxious. Nine months. Ten. Suddenly, he decided to call it a go. He cancelled his remaining contracts and cabled his wife that he was returning on a certain ship.

In arranging for his passage, he found he could make much better time on another vessel. Without notifying his wife, he sailed that very night.

He planned to inform her of his changed plans. But, the following morning, he thought better of it. She would not expect him until three days after he was actually scheduled to arrive. Why not surprise her?

Foolish man! From his one bitter experience, he should have known better than to try surprises on a Broadway wife. Probably, however, because the thought of anything wrong was so far from his mind, he failed to profit by his previous experience. Being a sweet guy at heart, he judged others by himself. And O, my friends, what a mistake that is!

The identical thing took place that had occurred with his first wife some four years before. Eager for the embraces of his wife and baby, he rushed to his home as soon as he could leave the pier.

The baby was asleep in her crib. But his second wife was in the arms of a young boy with blonde hair.

This time, Jack did not cringe from the sight. This time, as something indescribable surged in his breast, he did not wince with that horrible pain. This time, he laughed!

He laughed loud and long. He laughed so heartily that the tears rolled from his eyes. But his wife and her lover did not laugh with him. They cowered against the wall and looked in terror at the laughing man. For his laugh was the laugh of a maniac.

"Ho ho," he screeched. "Again they've done it to me. Again! Ha, ha, ha. O my God, what a joke on me! What a funny game. Laugh with me, you fools. Ha, ha, ha. Laugh with me I say." . . .

Ten minutes later, Jack left the house. But not alone. He had his baby with him. . . .

* * *

Today Jack believes in nothing but that little girl with the big blue eyes and the mop of curly blonde hair. He trusts no one—which is a state that all Broadwayites reach inevitably. The only difference is that some get there sooner than others.

He is divorced from his second wife. After his return to this city and the subsequent developement, he lost weight so rapidly that he fairly fell to seventy pounds. Doctors told him that unless he went to work and forgot what he had gone through, he would die.

He called the Keith offices and asked them to book him as far from New York as possible. They gave him a western route, and Jack went back to the stage.

The child is growing up in a boarding school near Tarrytown, N. Y. When he is playing in New York the baby is always by his side. It hurts him to have the kid motherless—but he swears he will never marry again. He can hardly be blamed, at that.

Just before Christmas he picked up the child and sat her on his lap.

"Baby," he said, "Christmas is almost here. Daddy wants to buy his sweetheart a nice present. What do you want most in the world?"

"Most in the world, daddy?" she repeated.

"Yes, darling."

The kid's eyes sparkled.

"Most in the world, daddy," she exclaimed "I'd like to have a baby brother. Lots of the other girls have them. Can I have one, too, daddy?" . . . .

* * *

Jack's new show opened shortly after Christmas. Before that it broke in at Philadelphia.

On one of the coldest nights of the winter, Jack walked out of the stage door of that Philadelphia theatre. He wrapped his coat tightly about him as the icy blasts blew up the alley.

Reaching the sidewalk, he saw the figure of a woman approaching him. Instinctively, he pitied her. She wore no coat and her hands were not protected by gloves. Her teeth were chattering with the cold. As she came closer, he recognized her. It was his first wife. But so, so different!

"Jack," she cried, "I'm doing this only as a last resort. I'm cold. I'm hungry. And I'm down and out. Help me, Jack. Please. For the sake of what we once were to each other."

The actor took off his gloves and made her put them on. He dug into his pocket and drew forth some bills.

"Here's $50," he asserted. "It's all I have right now. Come around tomorrow and I'll see if we can scare up enough for a coat. You oughtn't to be running around like that."

The woman took the money. She turned to leave without a word. Then she wheeled suddenly.

"Thanks, Jack," she muttered. "Thanks. There's just one thing I want you to know. In court that day, you told me I'd be sorry some day.

"You were right, Jack. I'm the sorriest woman in the world."

Silence for a moment. For an instant that hard gleam left the comedian's eyes. Then he spoke.

"Forget it," he said slowly. "After all, what difference can it make—now?" . . . .

XI.

A MAN OF IMPORTANCE

I LIKE the story of young Butch Moore, very, very much. Which means that you very probably will not like it at all. I have never seen it to fail. Whenever I publish a story that I think is good, nobody likes it. When I publish one that I feel is not so good, nobody likes it anyhow. Thus it is that I have the advantage over most young writers. I know just where I'll finish before I begin.

Let's see. What story is this? Oh, yes. Butch Moore. All right. Read it and sleep. . . .

A number of years ago—around 1905, let us say—a man named Butch Moore owned a saloon in New York. He had two sons and two daughters, and all of them were introduced to the saloon business at a very tender age. A bartender age, if I'm not too fresh.

Butch conducted his saloon in the most approved fashion of the day. Both his sons were trained to take over the business at some future date. And his two girls, both huge specimens of the feminine gender, would think nothing of busily lifting three or four drunks a night and tossing them into the alley.

Taking all in all, therefore, you can readily see that the Moores were just one happy family. To them, the business of conducting a saloon was no disgrace. If you had thought so around 1905, you would be wise to keep your opinion to yourself.

In 1915 the old man died. His eldest son, ascended to the throne. He now became known as Butch Moore. The Butch is dead—long live the Butch! And the business went on just the same as it had before the old man served his last beer.

With the advent of the dry era (pardon me while I laugh offstage) young Butch went into consultation with his brother.

"This is the only racket we know," he said, "and the best thing we can do is stick in it. It may be against the law, but we'll have to chance it.

"We know all the coppers around here and we know every guy in the neighborhood. We'll stay in the game for awhile and see what happens."

Thus, Butch became the owner of a place that, as time passed on, became known as a speakeasy. There were many changes from the old regime. But, essentially, the saloon business was just the same as it had always been.

With one difference, of course. Competition was keener. . .

In the winter of 1924, Butch left his speakeasy for a short stroll. His brother was behind the bar, attending to the customers. In walked a burly gentleman named Cassidy.

Cassidy was a detective in that precinct and was rated one of the toughest boys in the district. He had a reputation for hitting first and asking questions afterwards. More than that, he was pretty much on the level.

Cassidy didn't waste much time.

"I'm Cassidy from the inspector's staff," he announced belligerently, "and this place is under investigation. There's been complaints. What's your name, bartender? "

Butch's brother decided to stall for time. Butch would be back at any moment. He hesitated so long that Cassidy clenched his fists.

"Listen, you silly lookin' monkey," he growled, "you'll come across with your moniker or you'll catch a sweet punch on the snoot. Who do you think you're kiddin'? Come on now, wise guy—what's your name?"

Still the bartender hesitated. Cassidy threw down his pencil and paper and ran behind the bar. He caught Butch's brother by the tie and yanked him forward. He was just about to implant a solid punch when Butch stepped into the place.

"Hey," howled Butch, "what's goin' on here? What are you trying to do there, Billy? I'm Butch Moore and I own this place. What's this all about?

Cassidy still held the other Moore tightly. He looked at Butch.

"I'm gonna teach this bartender a lesson," he said, "and then I'll take care of you, Mr. Owner. I'm Cassidy of the inspector's staff, and when I asked this guy his name, he wouldn't come across."

Butch thought fast. He had to. If he didn't, his brother was in for a terrific punching. He shifted his cigar with no display of emotion.

"Listen, Cassidy," he murmured calmly, "if there's any punchin' to be done around here, I'm the guy that does it. Now I want you to take a little tip.

"If you start any trouble around here, I'll have you transferred to another post tomorrow. Not only you—but you can go back and tell your inspector that I'll have him transferred too. You get me?"

It was Butch's purpose to get Cassidy's mind away from the idea of hitting his brother. And he succeeded admirably. Cassidy released the man and broke into a loud and hearty laugh. The idea of a lowly speakeasy owner having an inspector transferred tickled him immensely.

"So you're gonna have me and the inspector run outa the district, hey?" he cried. "Hahaha. Man, you certainly are handin' me one swell laugh. Hohoho."

Having made a bluff—silly as it was—Butch felt that he might as well stick to his guns. Beside, it didn't sound at all bad when he spoke the words. The customers were looking at him in awe.

"Remember what I said," continued Butch, "if there is any kind of a complaint lodged against this very respectable place, you and your inspector will go. You mark my words."

Cassidy was still laughing. Evidently this was one of the funniest things that had ever happened to him. He slapped Butch jovially upon the back.

"Man," he laughed, "I certainly wish you luck. And I'll tell you something else. You better get busy right away on havin' the inspector and me transferred—because I'm turnin' in a complaint report just as soon as I get back to the station house. So long, old timer."

Cassidy departed. And Butch, although he knew his place was doomed, felt that he had at least accomplished something by his intended bluff. He wanted to save his brother from a certain beating and he had succeeded. . . .

Cassidy went back to the station house. As he entered the door he was still chuckling merrily. He felt that this joke was too good to keep. So he told every man in the house about it.

Most of them enjoyed it almost as much as Cassidy. Practically all of them knew Butch Moore and they felt certain he had no more power with the police commissioner than I have with the Prince of Wales. So he'd have the inspector transferred, would he? Ha, ha, ha, ha.

The following morning a notice arrived. It was short, comprehensive and very much to the point. Inspector M—— had been transferred to another precinct for the time being. Ordered to go with him were Detective Cassidy and several others!

It was nothing more than one of those coincidences that can happen only in real life. Yet Cassidy's story was still fresh in the minds of all who had heard it. Could it be possible that Butch Moore was responsible? Well, who else? Hadn't he said he'd do it? It must be true. There could be no other answer.

What the boys had no way of knowing, of course, was that the order had been signed by the police commissioner more than a week before. For reasons best known to himself, he had delayed it. And the commissioner had merely happened to send it around at the psychological moment. . . .

* * *

That night, around ten o'clock, three lieutenants showed up at the speakeasy of Mr. Butch Moore. Moore looked glumly at them. More trouble, no doubt.

"Mr. Moore," said one of them politely, "we wonder if we might trouble you for a few moments? We would like to speak with you alone."

Marveling at this unexpected display of geniality, Butch nodded his head and led them to the rear room. There they all sat down.

"There's no use of us beating around the bush, Mr. Moore," the first one stated, "we are all aware of the transfer and of the part you played in it."

Butch almost gave himself away.

"Transfer?" he repeated vaguely. "What transfer?"

The lieutenants all smiled.

"O, come now, Mr. Moore," said the speaker, " you know even better than we that Inspector M——— and Detective Cassidy have been shifted. You made good your threat. We all have our hats off to you at the station house."

Butch Moore almost fell from his chair. It suddenly dawned on him that something very amazing had happened. He stalled for a little more information. And he waved his hand in a deprecating gesture.

"Nothing at all, boys," he murmured. "Nothing at all."

The lieutenant placed a hand on his arm.

"Mr. Moore," he said cordially, "we've always liked you around here. We simply dropped around to apologize for Detective Cassidy's actions the other night. And we just want to be your friends. Is it agreed?"

"It's okay by me, boys," cried Butch, his eyes popping. "I wouldn't harm you boys for the world.

They sat for some ten more minutes. As they arose to leave, another lieutenant took Butch to one side.

"I hate to bother you, Mr. Moore," he whispered, "but I wonder if we could trouble you just for one more little favor? One of the captains in our station is a pain in the neck to us. Will you see if you can have him transferred, too?"

Butch sank into a chair.

"I'll do what I can," he responded weakly, "but I make no promises." . . . .

Since that episode, long years have gone by. There have been raids and raids and still more raids in Butch Moore's district.

But, for reasons best known to themselves, the police always pass up the wide open speakeasy of Mr. Butch Moore. Like that well-known brook, he goes on and on and on.

His fame has spread. Folks whisper that he is one of the biggest figures in the political world. The entire neighborhood treats him with the utmost respect. If he wants a favor in his district, he has but to call the station house. He is what is known as a big shot. . . . .

* * *

That's all there is, Gwendolyn. There isn't any more.

It's merely the short tale of the manner in which Butch Moore, speakeasy owner, became Mr. Butch Moore, Important Person. . . . .

XII.

THE BRACELET

ASK your best friend what he would do if he found out that his wife were carrying on an affair with another man and I'll lay you the odds that—in nine cases out of ten—he would be very brave about it.

"Me?" he would probably reply. "Well, it's a ridiculous question in my case, of course. But what could I do? After all is said and done, we are living in a modern age. If she really loved someone else more than she did me, what could I possibly do?

"I would ask her if she were certain that she loved the other man. If she said yes, she could have her divorce. I would be broken-hearted, of course. But why raise a rumpus?

Yes, sir. That's the way the average man will talk—because talk costs very little and the speech sounds fine. But let this man go home and actually find his wife in a compromising situation and—ouch!—how he will change. It's a fairly even bet that he not only shoots the lover full of holes, but makes his wife look like a choice cut of Swiss cheese in the bargain. . . .

With all this idiocy as an introduction, kindly permit me to drift gently into the story of George and Helen. When they were married, eighteen society reporters added new shoes to their expense accounts. Their union was the event of the season, whatever that might mean. It joined two of the most prominent names in the American social world.

In the course of time Helen gave birth to two children—both boys. She loved her children and her husband with all her heart and soul. With her husband the situation wasn't quite the same. He was nuts about the boys, but his wife was beginning to get on his nerves.

Helen and George led the existence of Society with a capital S. Helen played bridge, went to theatres, visited too many shops, drank cocktails and wondered where her husband was. George dropped into his office every now and then, drank too much rye, went to plenty of parties and seldom wondered where his wife was.

It was at a party one night that George was introduced to a woman named Mabel. Mabel was a beautiful damsel who dabbled in stage work every so often. She had an income from a mysterious source, the nature of which you may guess at if you choose. At any rate, she was a very fascinating woman.

For the second time in his life, George fell in love. He saw in Mabel everything he had discovered in his wife some ten years back. And the strangest part of the story is that Mabel fell just as much in love with him.

The affair drifted on, as these affairs will. George didn't want to remain away from home too much at nights. It wasn't that he cared what his wife would say; it was merely the fact that he didn't want to lose the love of those two boys of his. So he was face to face with a tough problem.

"Honey," said Mabel, "what are we going to do? I love you—and I'll go anywhere you say. I'll do anything you want me to. Only let's do something. This sort of life is too much for my nerves."

George made a snap decision.

"Dearest," he murmured softly, "you know I love you too. We're going away from New York. Tomorrow morning. We'll take a month of love in Florida—and the devil with everything else in life."

And he was on the level, too. The following morning found George and Mabel on a train for the South. And he had left without saying goodbye to his wife or leaving any word where he might be reached. . . .

* * *

Within the week his wife was frantic. The very bottom had dropped from her life. She had investigated. She knew about the other woman, even though she hadn't suspected anything serious before.

"Why has he done this to me?" she cried to a close friend. "If he had only come and told me he loved someone else, he could have had his divorce. I still love him. Madly. And there is nothing I can do.

"I don't even know where they are. Did he have to do this to me?"

Meanwhile, in the South, George and Mabel were together. They were in a small town on the coast. They sat in the sun. They swam. They fished. They went yachting. And they drank rye.

George had surprised Mabel with a present. It was a beautiful bracelet that his father had given his mother as an anniversary present many years before. His father had paid $60,000 for it at the time—so you can imagine the value of it at the present day.

"I want you to wear this, Mabel," he asserted simply. "It was my father's present to my mother. Now it belongs to you. And I hope you will always wear it in memory of our great love."

Mabel accepted the bracelet and kissed him warmly. For which you can hardly blame her. For a piece of jewelry worth $60,000, I'd be tempted to kiss Calvin Coolidge.

Another week went by and the great love between these two had cooled a trifle. George, accustomed to his clubs and parties, began to cast longing glances in the direction of Palm Beach and Miami.

"Look, dear," he chirped one morning. "I think you're getting just a trifle tired of this life. Suppose we hit out for Miami?"

Mabel nodded. She was too wise to say no. Because she knew that George would have gone anyhow. . . .

A trifle less than a month after they departed, Mabel and George were back in New York. Mabel went to her apartment. And George, knowing that he would have to face the music sooner or later, went home to meet his wife.

As soon as he walked through the door, his children ran to meet him. When he saw those kids, he realized that he had made a mistake. A bad mistake.

"Glad you're home, Daddy," shouted the elder of the two. "Mamma has been very lonesome. Did you have a good business trip, Daddy?"

A business trip? So that's what she had told the youngsters. Damned decent of Helen. Not many wives would take it that way. He had been a fool.

And when she came in and the children had been sent away, he told her so. He came clean. He told her everything. About the other woman. And Florida. And the bracelet. And how, when he saw the children again, he knew he had made a mistake.

"Will you forgive me, Helen?" he asked.

Then she talked.

"I still love you George," was her response, "and I imagine I always will. Things will never be quite the same, but if you want to come back—you are welcome. It will be best for the children, if not for me.

"There's one thing, however, that I must request. You must go to that woman and tell her you will never see her again. And you must get back that bracelet. It rightfully belongs to me, and I want it."

She grew bitter.

"If you must give her something, pay her off in cash. I don't care what you do. But I want that bracelet. When you have it and have said goodbye to her, you can come home. And we will never, as long as we are together, mention this subject again."

George nodded. Humbly. And he left. . . . .

Fifteen minutes later he was in Mabel's apartment. Plenty of men have faced the same task as he—and if it isn't the most difficult job in the world outside of writing stories like this, I don't know what is. He found it hard to get going, but when he finally did, he went to it with a rush.

He told her all his wife had said. He told her about the way the kids had greeted him and how he loved them. He told her about the bracelet. He told her that he could never see her again.

She nodded.

"I knew, George," she murmured, "that this was coming. I saw it some time ago. But if that's your choice, there is nothing I can say or do. We had our hour of happiness together. I guess it wasn't in the cards to ask for more."

She took the bracelet from her wrist and gave it back to him.

"Here, George," she went on, "give it back to your wife. I don't want to keep anything that rightfully belongs to her."

George stammered something about sending her a more beautiful gift in its stead. Or if she would prefer it, cash.

Mabel bit her lip.

"You shouldn't have said that, George," she said. "I don't want anything from you. You can't buy love with cash and you can't sell it either. Goodbye."

And that was all. . . . .

* * *

George and Helen sailed for Europe last summer. They played around in the various resorts in an effort to recapture love. But such was not to be. George grew bored all over again. He began to long for Mabel's company. Of such strange stuff are we moderns made.

George drank heavily. Much too heavily. He was in a gambling casino one night when the end came. The roulette wheel was turning. Beautiful women were all around him. He suddenly put his hand to his heart and an expression of pain came over his face. He fell to the floor.

The beautiful women were still around him. But he couldn't see them. He was dead.

His wife brought the body back to America. There were the usual regrets from the usual people who didn't care one iota. Such a young man. So nice, too. So clean in all his business dealings. And all the usual line of tommyrot. Whereupon George was lowered into his grave and the world went on just the same. . . .

How Mabel felt about it I have no way of knowing. She kept to her apartment and wasn't seen around much anymore. If she was griefstricken, there was no one who knew about it.

About a month after the funeral a package came for Mabel from one of the largest jewelry concerns on Fifth avenue. The messenger delivered it to her personally and then left. Mabel opened the box.

Her eyes opened with amazement. It was the same bracelet that George had given her and she had returned to him. In the bottom of the box was a small white card. It was signed by George's wife, the message upon it was very simple.

"I want you to keep this," it read, "as a memory of George. I have thought it all over. And I guess you loved him, too." . .

XIII.

HILARITY CAFE

THERE'S a basement cafe on Broadway. I'd like to change its real name—and with your permission, I'm going to call it the Hilarity club. From eleven in the evening until the hour of closing, it's a spot for gaiety and happiness—and empty laughter.

Here, during the early morning hours, one sees handsome men and beautiful women. Here, when the lights are blazing, are girls and music and song. Here, as others sleep peacefully in their homes, is Broadway merriment at its gayest heights. Here is where we live for today—and to hell with tomorrow.

But when the lights no longer blaze and the last patron has disappeared into the gray dawn, the Hilarity club is far from a joyous spot. Overhead, the traffic rumbles by. A new day has been born. And in the Hilarity, a lone man, guided by a lone light that shines dully, goes from table to table and sweeps up the litter that was left by the last of the laughers.

Porter, watchman, janitor—you may call this man any of these. He looks to be some 44 or 45 years of age. Actually he is in his fifties. He's rather a handsome fellow with curly gray hair and eyes of steely blue. He talks with a drawl somewhat in the fashion of Will Rogers.

Surely, in all the world, there is no more lonesome job than this. Above him on the street, thousands of people step briskly along—yet he sees none of them. All around him during the long day, are reminders of the joy that night will bring—yet he can never sample that joy.

Always that lone light burns. Set in the centre of the floor, it is his only sunlight. Sometimes, when mop and broom have been laid aside, he reads by it. Sometimes, he dozes by it—but the light is never turned off. That light is his spotlight. Perhaps his farewell spotlight.

The man's name is Yeatman C. Alley. And here is his story. . . .

* * *

Alley was born in Nashville, Tenn. His mother died when he was very young. His father thought that the way the horses ran was more important than family affairs. And Yeatman C. Alley was selling newspapers in Nashville at the tender age of eight.

There were eighteen routes on this newspaper list, and Alley was the youngest routeman of them all.

Thoughts of the stage were far from Alley's mind. He was interested in the theatre, of course, in the same manner as any other normal American kid. But as far as being an actor was concerned—this had no place in the youngster's scheme of things.

In those days in Nashville, the big event of the season was the arrival of a famous Shakespearean star for a week's engagement. These stars carried a small company and most of the extras were recruited from the boys and girls of the town.

Accompanied by a number of youths his own age, Alley applied for a job as an extra in a Shakespearean attraction. They gave him a bit to do, and he did it well. The next night, in another play, a slightly larger bit was waiting for him. At the end of the week, when the other boys were given a dollar each, his slip called for five.

The manager took him aside.

"Alley," he said, "you're a good boy and I'd like to see you with our company. You say you are carrying papers now and studying at night. Come along with us and study in the greatest school in the world. What do you say?"

The boy shook his head.

"Don't think so, Mr. Martin," was his response. "Think I'd better stick around here for awhile. Maybe, some time later——"

The two shook hands and Alley never saw that particular manager again. But the seed had been sown. The boy lay awake at nights, dreaming of audiences that cheered him again and again.

Some six months later, Alley was a member of a traveling theatrical organization presenting "Two Old Cronies." He was the prop boy, the assistant stage manager, the call boy, the curtain puller—and he often played as many as four small roles during one play. For this he received $25 a week, out of which he had to pay all expenses with the exception of transportation.

But he was happy. He was an actor now. The school books and the newspaper route were nothing more than memories of a past. . . . .

The years flew by. Alley played with a number of stock companies, and then returned to Nashville. He became interested in the business of amusement parks. Acting for a corporation, he opened one of these amusement centers in Nashville, Chattanooga and Knoxville. His particular pride and joy, however, was Glendale park, in Nashville.

On a certain morning in March, a woman named Mrs. Reynolds asked if she might see Mr. Alley. She had three children with her, and she wanted the theatrical manager to give them a chance to appear on one of his bills.

Alley watched the three children dance and then chose one of them—a little girl—to appear in an Easter scene. A huge Easter egg was wheeled upon the stage and, at the proper cue, the Reynolds child was to burst forth from the shell and go into a little toe dance.

Mrs. Reynolds was overjoyed at the opportunity. The child did as she was told and the Easter number was well received. People flocked to the park that week to see "that cute Reynolds girl perform."

From the time she last appeared in Glendale park, Alley never saw that Reynolds child again. He's heard of her, however—and so, I imagine, have you. Her name is now Marilyn Miller. . . . .

Some time later, a stock company was formed and went to Atlanta, Ga., for a short season. The company was known as "Alley's Associated Players" and the Georgians took the troupe to their hearts. Instead of a short season, Alley's company remained in Atlanta for six years.

Alley was riding high now. In the city of Atlanta, he was treated like a king. Money did not roll in with great speed, but there was more than sufficient for this man's needs. In his theatre, he was a monarch.

Like most of us, Alley asked more. He wanted Broadway. So he disbanded his stock company. He knew his theatre from every angle. The real money was on Broadway and he was going there.

In the beginning, Alley found Broadway a cold and heartless street. It was the old, old story of the agency grind day after day and week after week. Finally, when things looked darkest, he landed a job with a new motion picture concern that had just been formed by a man named William Fox.

On the first picture that Fox ever turned out, Yeatman C. Alley was the assistant cameraman. The film was entitled "Life's Shopwindow," and was made on Staten Island with Stuart Holmes as one of the stars. Part of Alley's duties were to provide the lunches for the players and hand in itemized bills to the home office.

Each player was allowed thirty cents for lunch. A sandwich, a piece of pie and a cup of milk or coffee was the average repast. The stars were treated like all the others and if Alley exceeded the thirty-cent limit, there was the devil to pay when the expense accounts were turned in.

Today, just a few steps from the basement in which Alley works, stands the Roxy theatre, a William Fox house. It is the largest motion picture house in the world—and thirty cents, the price of the first Fox star's lunch, will not get a seat in the topmost balcony.

After "Life's Shopwindow," Alley gradually forged ahead in the Fox organization, He was an art and technical advisor for "Gold and the Woman," with Theda Bara, and for "Les Miserables," with William Farnum—to mention just two of a great many. He was well on his way to the top.

And then he fell in love. . . . .

The girl was Mary Deane, who was playing at the time with Montgomery and Moore in "Hanky Panky." She loved him too. They were married. And they were very, very happy.

But there was a fly in their ointment of content. Somehow, it seems, there always is. Alley's work kept him in New York —and his wife's work carried her to the coast.

They tried it for a time, but it was no use. They loved each other too much to be apart. Alley threw up his job and Mary threw up hers. And the two of them went into business together as producers of tabloid girl acts.

Success crowned their efforts in a minor way. A half dozen of their acts had been routed and the profits were piling up very nicely. Then, too, they had each other. Which meant more to them than all the wealth of a dozen Fords or Mellons.

Soon there was a baby boy. Two years later, there was a baby girl. God had been good to them. Alley purchased a small house on the outskirts of Athol, Mass., where they might spend their summers. More than summers, too. When the winter of their lives rolled around, they planned to spend them there—together.

Alley looked back at a life that had finally borne fruit. The ragged newsboy of Nashville had seen life in all its phases and he now had a wife, two children, a small bank account that was growing, and a home.

Not bad. . . . .

Then the blow fell. His wife became desperately ill. They sent her to a Boston hospital. She suffered the tortures of hell. Cancer. No cure. They put in a hurry call to Alley. He rushed to Boston.

But too late. He arrived there just as the doctor was placing the cover over the woman's face.

Alley buried his wife five miles from the little farm on which they had planned spending their old age together. It was mid-winter and the snow was piled high. Bareheaded, he stood at the grave and watched them lower the body. Tears coursed from his eyes as the chill wind blew through his thin overcoat. Two days later, he was down with pneumonia. . . . .

I spoke with this man one afternoon. He seemed happy to see me. He introduced me to his children—proudly.

"This is Mary Emily," he cried, pointing to the little girl of four. "Named after her mother, you see.

"And this is Lionel David. Lionel for Lionel Barrymore and David for David Warfield. And if he's half the actor that either of them is, I'll be a very happy father."

Except for the four of us, the cabaret was empty. Only that one light shone forth. We spoke to him about his story.

He placed a warning finger on his lips and sent the children out into the foyer.

"Don't want them to hear anything," he cautioned after they had disappeared. "They don't know their mother's dead yet. I ain't never had the heart to tell 'em. I just say she's sick and that she'll come back some day.

"Can you use my story? Why not? I'm not ashamed of what I'm doing. After all, it's just the breaks in life. I get $30 a week, and that's bread and butter and clothes for my babies.

"They're all I have left in the world right now. After she died, my sickness and her burial took every cent I had in the world, including our home in the country. I took this job eight months ago and I'm keeping it as long as I can—for them.

"That's all there is to it. It's not much of a story, is it?"

No? Yeatman C. Alley works from five in the morning to five in the afternoon. Sometimes he takes the children with him to the club. Other times he leaves them at home with a girl who is paid $5 a week out of his meager income.

He washes these children of his. Three times a day, he cooks for them—rushing home at noon to prepare their lunch. He washes their clothes and he irons them. At night, the three of them have supper together. Shortly after, he places them tenderly in their beds. When they are asleep, he goes to bed. His day as watchman is over.

For two or three months, the children had a playmate. A stray cat had wandered into the club—and they would not let their father depart from the club until he had cooked some breakfast for the cat. But even that little game is over. Somebody stole the cat.

He's cut out tobacco now. Doesn't use it because the cost runs a little too high.

"It's kinda hard to git along on $30," he explains laughingly. "You see, I'm payin' $5 a week insurance on my life. That kinda hurts a little. But after all, if I pop off, the kids are gonna be all right. I kin close my eyes in peace. I wouldn't let that insurance lapse for all the tobacco in the world." . . . . .

I left Yeatman C. Alley. In the foyer of the club, I stopped to chat with the children for awhile. Beautiful kids, they were—both of them with blue eyes like their father's.

As I ascended the stairs, I looked back. A few feet from the lonesome light, Alley was dozing. His face wore a peaceful smile. As I looked, I gulped twice and cursed myself for a sentimentalist.

For the light threw a strange shadow on the man's head. It was only the rim of the lamp, of course, but I could have sworn it looked like a halo. . . . .

XIV.

SAMARITAN

IT happened one Friday afternoon just before the commencement of the Jewish Sabbath. An elderly, patriarchal Jew was being evicted from one of the squalid tenements on the lower East Side. It was a pitiful sight.

His meager and antiquated belongings were being placed upon the sidewalk. A city marshal was there to superintend the work. The landlord was there to superintend the marshal. And the aged Hebrew stood with bowed head, a veritable picture of utter despair and dejection.

A crowd gathered. They poured from the tenements to look at one whose plight was even worse than their own. They sighed with sympathy as they gazed upon the poor old man and his scanty belongings. They hurled epithets at the landlord who was putting a destitute greybeard into the streets.

A huge car passed by and came to a sudden stop. Evidently attracted by the sad spectacle, a stout and prosperous looking gentleman stepped from the machine and edged his way through the crowd.

"What's the trouble here?" he inquired gruffly.

A child told him.

"They're putting out old Chaim Rosenkranz," cried the child. "He can't pay his rent and the landlord's putting him out. The old man has no place to go."

The prosperous man clenched his fists and stepped over to the marshal.

"Where's the landlord?" He asked.

The marshal pointed him out. And the intruder walked up to him.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," he said angrily. "Putting such an old man out into the streets. Where will he go? What will he do? Have you no respect for old age?"

The landlord shrugged his shoulders.

"He owes me three months' rent," he responded, "and I can't afford to carry him any longer. Money is too scarce these days."

The prosperous looking man dug his hand in his pocket and drew forth a roll of bills.

"If you have no heart," he cried, "you are looking at a man who has. I cannot see this poor old fellow go homeless. How much does he owe you?"

The landlord's eyes opened wide.

"Forty-two dollars," he replied. "Three months at $14 a month."

The other man peeled off a $100 bill.

"Here, brother stoney heart," he stated, handing the bill to the landlord, "take your $42 out of this and $14 more for next month's rent. Make out a receipt, give it to the old man and give me my change. And put this so-called furniture back in the old man's room."

The landlord did as he was directed. Tears of gratitude welled in the aged Hebrew's eyes. A murmur of approbation ran through the crowd. The marshal stepped forward.

"You're a good man, sir," he murmured. "If you want to give me your name for my report, I——"

The good Samaritan shook his head.

"It's not necessary," he returned. "I'm merely a man who believes in doing a good turn when I can. There is so much misery in this world, that a kind deed is a rarity. Good afternoon."

He strolled to his car, stepped in and was driven away. The old man walked slowly up the stairs to his room. The crowd dispersed.

The landlord walked to his bank to deposit his money. On the top was that $100 bill. The teller took it, examined it and placed a stamp across it. The landlord looked puzzled. The teller spoke.

"Would you mind stepping around to that little office over there and telling us where you got this bill?" he inquired. "It's a counterfeit" . . . .

BOOK TWO
NOON

XV.

REWARD

IT was late in March, 1927. Shortly after one a. m., Dennis O'Brien was standing in front of an apartment house on Park Avenue. This, I will have you understand, was no ordinary apartment house. It was nothing for the rabble. It was a very exclusive spot and you had to give the landlord plenty of references before he permitted you to pay the rent of $10,000 a year.

On one of the floors in that house a big party was going on. Dennis O'Brien knew that. He had been standing there for an hour or so and watching the guests arrive. He enjoyed it, too. He had been on the force for a short time and this beat was pretty dull.

Dennis wondered just what was going on in that apartment. Plenty of music, no doubt, and oodles of champagne.

The policeman sighed. Would he ever get a break and move into such a house as this? What a chance! The closest he'd ever come would be to get called in on a robbery or a shooting. And even then—

Hatless and coatless, a young man emerged from the house. The doorman, all done up in braids and whatnots, followed closely on his heels.

"Officer," cried the young man excitedly, "for God's sake, come quick. A woman has been drowned!"

A woman drowned in a Park Avenue apartment? Dennis O'Brien narrowed his eyes.

"What are you givin' me?" he grunted. "Are you drunk?"

The young man shook his head violently.

"I'm telling you the truth, officer," he stated hurriedly.

"It's a young girl from a Broadway show. She lying in the tub—dead!! O, won't you please come up?"

The boy was evidently telling the truth. The patrolman grasped his stick and dashed into the apartment house. . .

* * *

Before going any further with the story, it might be well for us to catch up with ourselves. How did the young beauty get into the tub during a big party? Take it easy, my friends. I'm coming to that.

Not only was our heroine one of Ziggy's prize beauties—but she was also one of Broadway's prize stews. She couldn't handle liquor, but she drank just the same. Ordinarily rather quiet and reserved, two drinks of brandy would bring on a cooch dance that would make Mr. Volstead wish he was a kid again.

Accordingly, no matter where she went, the men wasted little time getting her tight. This party in the swell apartment was no exception. She had arrived directly after the show. She felt a trifle blue and she poured four stiff drinks into herself. And, oh me, oh my!

Before you could say Wladek Zbyszko, the little lady was no lady. She was doing cutes all over the place and kissing butlers as well as millionaires. Better, in fact. Suddenly she placed a hand on her forehead.

"Feel dizzy," she grunted. "Show me the bath. I'll be okay. Jus' show me the bath."

They led her to one of the bathrooms. She staggered in and locked the door. . . .

About an hour later, the party was in full swing. There were many people present and nobody remembered the girl who had been ill. One of the other show girls suddenly recalled the fact that the stewy lady had not been seen in some time.

Wending her way to the host, she mentioned the fact. He opened his eyes wide.

"That's right," he chirped. "I clean forgot about her. Let's see what's happened to her."

He knocked at the door of the bathroom into which the girl had gone. No response. He rapped louder. No response. The host grew worried.

He called two other men. Together they bounced against the door. It fell. They rushed in. And there was the little lady, in the nude and in the bathtub with water covering her nose. For some drunken reason she had decided to take a bath. She had fallen asleep and drowned herself!

The host clenched his fists.

"We're in for it, boys," he muttered. "Don't say anything to the others but somebody go for a cop."

And that's how Dennis O'Brien walked into that very swell apartment house during that very swell party. . . .

* * *

The patrolman took one look at the girl. He should have called an ambulance—but he didn't. If the truth be told, he didn't think of it.

Yanking off his coat, he picked the girl from the tub and tossed her on the bed. Every policeman is taught the art of artificial respiration, and Dennis O'Brien was too young to have forgotten the rules. He began to work on the girl. And he worked like a trojan.

For twenty minutes he pumped the girl's arms and yanked her about. The perspiration rolled down his face and his breath came in short gasps. But finally he was repaid. The girl moved and showed signs of life. Then the policeman stood up.

"She'll be all right," he said tiredly. "I'd advise you to get a doctor now and he can do the rest. I'll have to be movin' along."

The patrolman put on his coat, mopped his brow and began to walk toward the door. One of the guests stopped him and led him aside.

"Officer," whispered the guest, "nobody around here seems to appreciate just what you've done. But I think you've done a wonderful thing in saving that girl's life. And I want you to accept this little present from me."

A roll of bills was placed in Dennis O'Brien's hands. He didn't hesitate. After all, he had done a hard job. He was entitled to something. These people were all millionaires. Why not?

"Thanks," said Officer O'Brien. And he left. . . .

Downstairs. Dennis O'Brien walked rapidly to the nearest corner and stood under the lamppost. He drew out the roll of bills and began to count his money.

On the top was a $10 note. Underneath were 150 United Cigar coupons . . . .

XVI.

CLIPPING

TOM and Henry had grown up together. Practically the same age, they had been boon companions as far back as they could remember. They attended the same schools, lived the same life and were practically inseparable at all times. It was a rare friendship for these times.

When they had completed their high school educations, Tom and Henry went into different businesses. Henry secured a position in Wall Street while Tom cast his lot with a jewelry firm. The years passed. And by the time they had reached the age of twenty-three, both boys were doing fairly well in their respective lines.

In the summer of that year, it was agreed that they would spend their vacation together at a seaside resort on the Atlantic coast. They made the usual preparations and the usual plans. Just a few days before they were scheduled to leave, however, Tom was told by his firm that he would be unable to go at that time. His vacation would have to be put off until a later date.

So Henry, who was unable to change his vacation date, was compelled to go alone. It was unfortunate, but there it was. Tom went down to the train and said goodby to his pal. It was a real goodby, too. For Tom never saw Henry alive after that.

Henry died in a strange manner. The papers carried complete reports of it at the time. He had, it seems, taken a girl at the seaside resort for a drive. They had parked the car on a side road that was known as Lover's Lane. A hold-up man had appeared, flourished a gun, stripped a ring from the girl's finger and demanded all of Henry's money.

The boy refused to submit. He attempted to fight. The gun went off and Henry fell. By the time the girl had summoned aid, the robber was gone and Henry was dead.

There had been, of course, the customary investigation. The girl, seemingly a mental wreck because of the unfortunate happening, was questioned and quickly cleared by local authorities. She had always resided in that seaside resort, you see, and it was very evident that a local girl could do no wrong.

The girl gave the police a description of the killer, a reward was posted and the case was closed. It was closed, that is, for everyone but Tom.

At the grave of his pal, Tom swore vengeance. Not the usual dramatic stuff. There were no vigorous announcements to other people. There were no words to the papers. Just a grim promise to himself. And that was sufficient. . . .

When his vacation time arrived Tom went to the same resort in which Henry had been killed. Quietly and with no attempt to communicate with the police, he began his own investigation. He had studied every angle of the case and before he left he had managed to meet the girl who had been with Henry on the fatal night. He was extremely nice to her and made no mention of the fact that he had ever known Henry.

For two long years Tom communicated with the girl at various times. He spent his following vacation at the same spot and saw her frequently at that time. And as the weeks turned into months he gradually pieced together the true story.

The girl was a racketeer and had been engaged in one of the most despicable games in the world. For several years before Henry had turned up, she had been working her racket in conjunction with another racketeer. And she had always earned very easy money.

The plan was simple. She would sit upon the beach in the afternoon and flirt with a man who looked promising. A promising man was one who was married and evidently carried plenty of money with him. She would agree to go to the theatre with him at a certain time. And after theatre she would suggest that he drive her into the country.

Her co-worker, of course, was waiting for her at a chosen spot. As soon as the car was parked, he would appear on the scene with his gun. The sucker would invariably come across and just as invariably make no squawk to the police. He wanted no publicity. The wife wouldn't like it.

Until Henry came along, then, everything was hotsy-totsy. The girl would grow hysterical and the sucker would never suspect her. As time went along, the girl and her companion grew bolder. It was so absurdly simple that they no longer cared whether a man was married or not. And that's how Henry had died.

Tom was sure of his facts. The girl was no longer engaged in the racket. The publicity of the shooting had killed all chances for further profit. Her co-worker had disappeared and Tom knew that he had no chance of ever finding him. So it was the girl who would be made to pay for Henry's life.

But how? Report the entire story to the police? Foolish. Nothing would come of it. He would have to settle this score by himself. He thought carefully and long. And then he made his decision. . . .

Sitting on the beach with her one afternoon, he suggested a canoe ride in the ocean. She agreed. Soon they were riding the waves far beyond the life lines. Tom kept going further and further. The girl grew puzzled.

"You're going out too far, Tom," she cried. "What's——"

She never finished that sentence. A look of horror came over her face as she saw Tom's eyes.

"You're going further than this," he muttered. "You're going so far that you'll never come back. You're going to die, you hear?

"For two years, I've been waiting for this. Henry R— was my best friend. You led him to his death just the same as I'm leading you to yours. I'm going to even the score.

The girl made an attempt to leap from the canoe. Tom raised the paddle and struck her a blow across the temple. The canoe turned over and both went into the water. Tom grasped her by the hair and began to swim toward shore.

But he held her head beneath the water! The blow had stunned her and the rest was easy. By the time the life saver pulled them both to the beach, the girl was dead. Tom's job was over. . . .

* * *

In his pocket, Tom carries a clipping. He will always carry it, I guess.

"New Yorker in Heroic Attempt to Save Girl," it reads. "Betty L——, witness in the slaying of Henry R——, in Lover's Lane two years ago, was drowned in the ocean yesterday afternoon. She met her death in spite of a heroic attempt to rescue her on the part of Tom B——, a New Yorker with whom she was canoe riding when the accident took place.

"As B—— explained the accident, the canoe had suddenly overturned and the girl had struck her head on its side as she fell into the water. Although he was almost a mile from shore, he brought the girl to the beach before he collapsed. It was a remarkable feat." . . . .

XVII.

HANDSOME BOY

IF you're not in the mood for an ironic story, it would be better for you to skip this yarn. There is bitterness here—and plenty of it. I've written of many twisted lives, but never have I struck one quite so cruel as this. Let's get into it without too many details.

George was born in California. In his second year in college his father followed his mother in the death to which she had passed some years before. George quit college as soon as the funeral was over. He had no incentive to remain.

The boy was an extremely handsome youth. Nothing womanish about him. Just a clean-cut, dark-complexioned fellow with sparkling eyes. The girls had been daffy about him ever since he had been able to toddle from his baby carriage. But it hadn't spoiled him in the slightest.

Funny thing about that. George had never been particularly interested in girls. He was perfectly normal, of course—but he was more at home in the company of men. Perhaps the opposite sex had babied him too much in his early years.

His friends advised George to tackle the movies. The boy laughed at the idea at first. But as they talked, George began to think it over. After all, why not?

So George went to Hollywood. And he clicked. . . .

* * *

The film magazines and newspapers carried plenty of stuff about George at that time. He was the leading man for Corrine Griffith in one of her biggest successes and he enacted an important role in one of Norma Talmadge's best films. In another picture, he stole the honors from Mae Busch, who was billed as the star.

Things looked bright for him—but in spite of everything George wasn't particularly happy. The motion picture business did not appeal to him. He didn't like the tinsel, the hokum and the false friendships.

Two of his best pals in Hollywood were Viola Dana and Shirley Mason, her sister. George liked both of these girls. He felt that they were regular—and different from most of the other women around the studios. And it was to Viola Dana that he unfolded his story one afternoon.

"You may think me foolish, Viola," he confessed, "but I don't like this life. I haven't done badly. But I guess it's just because I am luckier than most.

"I wish I could get into some other line of business. Almost anything, I think, would be better than this. They tell me I have a future here, but I am not looking for that kind of a future. What do you suggest, Viola?"

"That's a tough question, George," was her response. "If you don't like this branch of the business why don't you try some other angle? Why not the New York stage? You're a good-looking guy; you can sing a little and you can talk. How about it?"

That gave George an idea. True, the stage was not what he wanted, either. But it would be a change. And he'd be living in New York, where anything might happen at any time.

A few days later George wired an agent in New York. The agent responded immediately with word that both Flo Ziegfeld and George M. Cohan were interested in a juvenile of his type.

George never got to see George M. Cohan. He reached the

Ziegfeld office first and Flo saw him. Before he left, Ziegfeld had an option on his services.

On his second night in New York a girl came into his life. He had known many women, but none of them had ever hit him like this one. He met her at the home of the parents of one of his college pals. They had invited him to dinner when he phoned. And she was there, too.

There's no use telling you how these things happen—and what happens after they happen. You know just as much as I do about them. And if you don't, you will.

George went for this girl like Clara Bow for a new love affair. He knew she was the only one in the world he'd ever care for. He took her home that night. He called her the following morning. Before the week was up he had asked her to marry him.

There were two things in the way. Her father—and another man. The father is a doctor who still retains old-fashioned ideas. He has a good name and a good practice. The idea of his daughter chasing around with a good looking actor was something that didn't appeal to him at all. After George had been in the house on two consecutive evenings, the father requested his daughter not to have him there again.

The other man was in the way in a different fashion. It was practically understood that the girl was engaged to him. He was a wealthy man in his early forties. There was nothing of the rounder about him and he was a decidedly decent chap. And a choice, you may be sure, of which the father heartily approved.

Thus, with the exception of the girl, you have the situation. And how did the girl feel? Well, that's hard to answer. She liked George a great deal. That was only natural. But she wasn't sure that she loved him. And there was her father. And the other man. And George was an actor.

She talked to him about that. They had reached the stage of the game where they could talk freely.

"George," she said one night when she met him for dinner, "I've been very honest with you and you know exactly how things stand. If it wasn't for the fact that you're an actor, I don't think father would object to you. But this way——"

George took her hand.

"Honey," he said simply, " I adore you more than anything else in the world and I'm going to do everything in the world to make you happy.

"I never wanted to be an actor. I have no love for the life. I turned to it because it seemed an easy way of earning a necessary living

"Tomorrow morning I'm through.

"I'm going down to Wall Street and get a job in that game. I'll work like the very devil—for you."

The girl looked deep into his eyes.

"George," she said softly, "I love you. Take as long as you want to make good. Because I'll wait for you."

And it's a good thing her father and the other man weren't around to see what happened after that. . . .

* * *

Eight months had passed. George had done extremely well in that short space of time. He had connected with an excellent Wall Street house and his firm regarded him highly. He was only earning $75 a week, which was nothing for him. But his prospects were bright. And he was in love.

The father had removed his objections to George as a caller at his home. The girl and the boy spent many evenings together. The other man was practically out of the picture. It was decided that when George rose to $125 they would be married. Happy dream!

Just when things looked best, the blow fell. A customer phoned a stock order. It was another man's customer, but George took it. For some reason or other, he forgot about it. The following day found the devil to pay. The boss spoke harshly to George. Instead of apologizing, George grew fresh. And ten minutes later he was out of a job.

George was young. And he was sore. He walked into a phone booth and called the girl.

"Look, dear," he cried. "I just had some trouble down town and I quit my job. There was no money in it anyhow. I'm going to see Ziegfeld. I'm going back on the stage and make some real money. We can get married just that much sooner."

The girl's voice seemed strangely distant.

"If that's what you have in mind," it said, "you don't have to worry about marriage at all. I don't want my husband on the stage. Is there anything else you have to say?"

Words tumbled out. They fought over the wire. Words. More words. And then the girl said something that placed a knife in the boy's heart.

"I want to tell you something else, too," she snapped. "I'm not so sure that I ever loved you more than the other man. I was never sure. Now I've learned something. If he still wants to marry me, he can."

George hung up the receiver. Never had he been hurt like that. He walked from the booth like a man in a daze. For he was very young. And he didn't know much about the things women can say when they're angry. . . .

George didn't go to see Ziegfeld. He dropped into a speakeasy and started a new life right then and there. He hit the chutes in a beautiful manner. If ever a man slid downward faster then he, I've never encountered him in real life.

You see, it was simply that George didn't know about these things. He thought that the girl's words were the end of everything. He didn't know that he had but to see her again.

So he slid. He didn't try to find work. He didn't care enough for that. He spent every cent that he had. When the money was gone, he bummed his drinks. He was arrested several times, and the judges lectured him at length. But he hadn't used his right name and the papers were none the wiser.

A hundred times—no, ten thousand times—he went to phone the girl. But each time he lifted the receiver he placed it back again. Let her see him like this? What would be the use? More, she probably would refuse to speak to him.

A year passed. Sixteen months. George had gone the route. Drinking the cheapest kinds of liquor in the cheapest kinds of rooms. Meeting and stumbling along with the cheapest kinds of women. Looking at life through dull eyes in a face that was no longer handsome.

He found himself doing strange things. His steps had lost their spring. He found himself staggering when he had nothing to drink. He learned that he could not walk through a dark room without falling.

George was frightened. What had happened to him? He went one day to a free clinic and told the doctor how strangely he was acting.

The doctor examined him. His diagnosis was brief and extremely to the point. As George gripped the back of a chair, the doctor mentioned one word—the name of a horrible disease. A harsh and brutal word. Syphillis.

"Try to save you," George heard vaguely. "Try our best. Come in again tomorrow. If you're married, tell your wife. If you're not, don't think of marriage. Next patient, please." . . . .

George thought of but one thing. Suicide. After all, what else was left? Why try to save himself now? What good was he—to anyone?

Yes, he would do it. That night. Into the water. Only one thing to be done before the leap. Must call the girl and say goodbye. Must hear that voice once more.

In his pocket were eight cents. He called the number with his last nickel. She answered. She!

His throat was dry. The sweat stood out on his forehead. He mentioned her name. And from the other end came a sharp cry.

"George!" said the voice. "Dearest boy, where have you been? God, I've looked everywhere for you. I've written and I've searched and I've prayed for you to come back to me.

"There never was anybody else. There couldn't be. Oh, my darling, I'm so happy. Where are you? I must see you. I love you." . . . .

* * *

A few minutes later, George was walking slowly towards the East River. His eyes weren't sparkling. Neither were they dull.

They were blank. . . .

XVIII.

FOUR OF A KIND

THESE are strange and hectic days in which we live. Which is the only excuse I can offer you for this story of Peter and Joan and Henry and Sue. It's a punk excuse. But so, I suppose is the story. And therein lies my salvation.

We'll take Joan first. All right, I'll take her first. She was a model for an ultra-fashionable Fifth Avenue store. She was pretty, vivacious and the kind of a girl who is known as a good scout. She enjoyed attending parties and found it quite the proper thing to have a hangover when she reported for work in the morning.

Peter was Joan as a man. Living on an income from his father's estate and spending a few hours a day on a Wall Street job, he found life a rather simple affair. He, too, found much fun in parties and did his share toward supporting the Bromo-Seltzer and Eno Fruit Salts' interests. He met Joan at a party. And before either one was completely aware of what was happening, they had eloped at three in the morning and were exceedingly married a few hours later.

Such a romance has but a slim chance of success. This one was no exception. For the first few months, Peter and Joan rather enjoyed the novelty of a legal marriage. But the novelty soon was gone. And at the end of a year they were fighting bitter battles.

This combination of marital battles and bad gin began to give Joan the creeps. When she met Henry at one of those inevitable parties, she was practically ready for anything. Henry was an extremely wealthy oil man from Texas. He wasn't so much on youth and good looks, but he had plenty of "it" in his bank account.

Henry was even more married than Joan. He not only had a wife, but he had a child as well. But he had reached a stage in his career where he didn't care much about anything. And he found Joan an amiable drinking companion and a girl who coincided with many of his ideas.

As a result of this companionship, Henry's wife parked her child in Texas and rushed to New York. After getting the necessary evidence, she very promptly sued for divorce and named Joan as co-respondent. In due time the divorce was granted. And Joan married Henry.

Meanwhile, how about Peter, the husband? Well, things were not going so well with him. The Wall St. crash had knocked everything to its lowest levels and Peter no longer had the income that he had before. More, his Wall St. job was a thing of the past.

When his wife was named as a co-respondent, Peter began to figure angles. The oil man was evidently a very wealthy gent. Why shouldn't Peter cash in on that basis? Hadn't the big oil man stolen his dear wife's affections? Sure.

Accordingly, Peter managed to get in touch with Henry's wife. Sue was her name—and you have my word of honor that there is no pun intended.

Peter was very courteous to Sue. He escorted her to a number of New York's very finest speakeasies; and if that doesn't come under the head of courtesy, I don't know what does. Although Sue had never known much about this type of thing, she soon discovered that she had a great liking for it. And, it might be added, she found that she had a great liking for Peter.

There's no use boring you with too many details. Sufficient to relate that, in the unnatural course of events, Peter was awarded a divorce from Joan. As soon as the decree was granted, he and Sue were married.

Thus, the yarn becomes simplified. Sue and Henry, originally married and the parents of a child, were divorced. Joan and Peter, originally married for no good reason, were divorced. Henry and Joan became man and wife. Peter and Sue became man and wife.

Follow me? Oh, you do, do you? Well, you're luckier than I am. I hardly know where I am, myself. . . .

Neither marriage was a success. Joan began to scrap with Henry as soon as they were pronounced man and wife, as they are sometimes called these days. A few weeks with the wealthy husband of hers and she suddenly realized that Peter hadn't been such a bad fellow after all.

The same thing held good for the other two. It didn't take Sue long to learn that Peter's pace was just a trifle too fast for her. She hadn't been brought up on it—and she was growing just a little too far beyond her teens to start all over again. She, too, began to compare husbands. And Henry didn't suffer by the comparison.

The result was inevitable on both sides. Divorces were arranged once again—but this time there was no arguing and no bickering. The beginning of autumn found all four of them free. And you may be sure that neither Henry nor Joan lost anything in a pecuniary way by the transactions.

Strange the way things happen. With the four of them absolutely free, they became friends. Sue and Henry talked to each other in peaceable fashion for the first time in many moons.

As a result of all this harmony among the four, a dinner was arranged. It was such a dinner as would delight the heart of a Freddie Lonsdale. Four people—each one twice married and each one twice divorced. And each one liking the first one who had been lost.

They spoke frankly and easily, these four. For the first time in their lives, perhaps, they were honest with themselves. And as the wine bill mounted, Peters' arm stole about Joan and Henry edged closer to his first wife.

Suddenly Peter arose. If he wasn't exactly sober, he made up for it by being very serious.

"My friends," he said, "none of us is children. I think we'll all agree that every bit of our troubles was caused by drink.

"There's no use going into what has happened to each of us—but I think we're smart enough to agree that we've made mistakes. And those mistakes were caused by nothing but drink. When we drink we can't talk sanely.

"If you won't think me too crazy, I want to propose that each of us finishes our last glass of wine right here and now —and then break the glasses. And we will all remain on the wagon until such time as we feel we can drink as ladies and gentlemen should drink. What do you say?"

The other three caught the spirit of the thing. They drained their glasses of wine and left the dinner. They were through drinking forever. . . . .

* * *

A short while after, when they were all as drunk as they could be, Peter and Henry married their original wives. And if you're looking for the happy ending, here it is. The four of them are already apart—and they're fighting like hell to stay that way. . . . .

XIX.

KEEPER OF THE MORGUE

THERE'S a man in the newspaper profession who is very much behind the scenes. So far behind, in fact, that there are but few on his own paper who ever get to know him. He is the keeper of the morgue.

A newspaper morgue is a spot where clippings are kept. Whenever a name crops into a newspaper, the story about that name is clipped and filed away in a reference room. Thus, although ten or twenty years may elapse before the same name again figures in the papers, the record in question is always dragged out before the reporter writes his story.

Many men, attempting to hide their pasts, are flabbergasted when newspapers expose them. A story that is fifteen years old is paraded before the public and the man involved blames a friend for talking to the papers. He's wrong. It's the morgue that does the trick—and the morgue can't lie. . . .

* * *

A quiet, unobtrusive sort of a man, Martin sat at his desk almost every day in the year. His paper was the Morning ——. Day in and day out, he fingered clippings that had just been removed from the daily papers. He catalogued them carefully and finally deposited them in one of the dusty index files that graced the walls of his strange office.

Often, one could see him working far into the night. His gray head bent over his desk, he would carefully separate the countless items that formed still another day. All to be filed away by a man who would never again see any of these things.

He was a faithful creature. Carefully—almost religiously

—he guarded the little green room that housed so many ghosts. He saw to it that no one disturbed his charges—the dead news of bygone days.

Martin was not the talkative kind. Far from it. He tried to discourage conversation. The idle gossip of the newspaper world—and believe me, my friends, no gossip is more idle—meant nothing to him.

To the paper one day, however, came a young chap that Martin grew to like. It took time—but Martin seemed to sense the fact that this young reporter had the makings of a real guy. So when the reporter was placed on the night shift of the paper, Martin and he would often sit down for a little chat. The paper was not large and when evenings were dull they had time for words.

The reporter would sit beside Martin's desk and watch him with fascinated eyes. As the morgue keeper worked, he would say nothing. But when the work was over, he would light his pipe and turn to the reporter with a twinkle in his eye.

"And so goes another day, son," he would cry. "One more day nearer to heaven. One day less to fret and worry about."

Suddenly, as if struck by a thought, he would reach into the bottom drawer of his desk and bring forth a large black note book. The book was old and its contents were still older. For the black book was stuffed with aged clippings. Clippings that Martin himself had written in years gone by.

These clippings told Martin's story better than any words I might write here. They carried him back to the days when he was a mere copy boy. They told him of his gradual rise. They brought him to the years when he was a star reporter and one of the very best in the game.

On each story the magic words—"By William Martin"—were underscored with blue pencil. There were interviews with great men of the past. Scoops on murders that have long since been forgotten. Tales of the mighty who have long since gone the way of the humble.

This book was the biggest thing in Martin's life. And as he spoke of each story, a joyous light came into his eyes.

"Weren't many of them who could beat me in those days," he would murmur to the reporter. "On the old Examiner, I remember, there were three of us. Jennings, Baron and myself. The 'three bloodhounds,' they called us. Always on the go. Always hunting news.

"Have we got anything like that now? Humph! I should say not. All we have is a few college boys who wear canes and call themselves newspapermen. Newspapermen! My God—in my days, we'd make them look like monkeys on any story they attempted.

"And look at all those new-fangled gadgets that send a story all over the world before you can say 'Jack Robinson.' In my day you had to plug to get your copy. The reporter that plugged the hardest got the best results. And what do those 'reporters' do today? They just sit at their desks and let the stuff roll in all printed up for them."

Here he would snort belligerently.

"Hell, man," he would cry. "That's not reporting as I used to know it. Why, even a plumber could do that!" . . . .

In due time the reporter received an offer from a magazine. He decided to accept it. And the first one he told was his old pal, Martin.

The two shook hands. Martin returned to his work. The reporter lingered for a second.

"I'll drop in to see you," he murmured.

There was no answer from Martin. He was already busy with his news clippings—piling up ghosts for the future. . . .

* * *

Some four months later the reporter decided to visit his old pal. He walked into the little green room. Martin was gone and there was a new man in his place. Fear clutched at the reporter's heart. He went to the city editor and asked where Martin had gone.

"Martin's dead," was the response. "Died soon after you left. And by the way, before he died, he left this package for you. We didn't have your address so we kept it for you. Here it is."

The reporter opened the package. The black notebook tumbled forth. The reporter walked slowly to the desk and turned the pages. There they were. All those clippings, yellowed by the march of the years.

On the last page of the book, the reporter found a new piece of copy. It hadn't been printed; it was merely pasted in. The reporter read it.

It was Martin's obituary—written by himself. . . .

XX.

TOUGH GUY SAMMY

AS far back as folks can remember, Sammy wanted to be a tough guy. It was a definite complex with him. His father and mother, a pious old couple, were heartbroken by the things the boy said in the house. He seemed to have no respect for law. Or order. Or anything.

"I hate cops," he'd tell his father. "And I like crooks. They're the only real guys. Don't you be surprised if I plug a cop some day. I'd like to stand 'em in a row and plug 'em all, one by one."

Then Sammy would look at his father to see if his words produced the desired effect. They never failed. His mother would sob and his father would beat his breast. That a son of theirs should say such terrible things!

They didn't know something, however, that was known to practically every boy in the neighborhood. They didn't know that their boy was only big in his talk. They didn't know their boy was a coward.

When Sammy was 17, he went to work. He set out to learn the fur business. He got as far as a machine, and stayed where he was. That was far enough, however He earned a good salary and his wants were meagre.

Sammy's real ambition, however, had never been satisfied. He still craved to be recognized as a gunman. He wanted to walk down the streets and have people shudder when they saw him. He wanted to do anything that would give him a bad name. But an unholy terror clutched at his heart whenever there was danger about him. And his very cowardice made him a respectable citizen.

In the nights Sammy would patronize the neighborhood speakeasies. When a gunman or a notorious racketeer would swagger in, Sammy's eye would light up. He would push close to his hero. Once in a while, when a gunman grew drunk enough, he would talk to Sammy and buy him a drink. Then Sammy would be in seventh heaven.

Thus Sammy marched along until he had reached the twenty-fourth year of his life. Just a harmless youth, striving desperately to be something that was not in the cards for him. . . .

* * *

Girls never worried Sammy to any degree. He had convinced himself long before that, following the crook's creed, women are nothing but omens of trouble. He spoke contemptuously of women—until he met the right one.

The right one was no beauty. Slight and unassuming, she would never give Ziegfeld any heart throbs. But she was a sweet little kid with honest eyes. And to Sammy she was the most wonderful thing he had ever met.

When he took her out for the first time he put on the act for her in great style. He told her of his gunmen pals and of the desperate deeds he had been doing for years. As he spoke, he saw her eyes growing larger and larger. She believed him.

"We fellers don't belive in telling things to dames," he assured her, "because that's a dangerous thing to do in our game. But I can tell you're different. I can talk to you.

"I'm in the fur business. Sure. But that's only to fool the cops, see? At nights I generally go out with the mob. And we don't stop at nothin'. I know they're gonna catch me some day—but I just can't get away from it. The thing is in my blood."

The girl was biting her nails. This young boy was a slave to crime. What a pity it all was. If there was only something she could do.

She placed her hand on his.

"You can get away from it, Sammy," she cried earnestly. "I just know you can. You wait and see. Just wait." . . .

A few months later, Sammy popped the question. He knew that he loved this kid with all his heart. And he was sure that she loved him. Why not marry?

The girl looked deep into his eyes.

"Sammy," she replied, "I love you. You know that. And I want to become your wife.

"But, Sammy, you must promise me one thing. You must promise me that you will go straight from now on. Promise me that you will give up all of your tough friends and never see them again. Will you promise?"

Sammy nodded rapidly. If she only knew what a simple request she was making!

"It's hard, darling," he murmured. "But you have my word. I promise."

He took her in his arms. His "career of crime" was over. . . . .

* * *

Sammy left the girl's house that night with his head in the clouds. His heart was singing. If there was a happier guy in the world at that moment it would have been news to Sammy.

He walked slowly toward his home. As he turned a corner, a drunk bumped into him. He looked at the stew. And he recognized him immediately. It was one of the toughest birds in the neighborhood. One of his heroes. The drunk looked at an approaching policeman and reached suddenly into his pocket. He drew forth some cheap jewelry and a revolver.

"Here, kid," muttered the stew. "Hold this stuff for me for a minute."

He thrust the stuff into Sammy's hands. The boy was paralyzed with fear. The drunk stumbled away. The policeman came up. He looked—and saw the gun and the jewelry in Sammy's hands.

"What are you doing with that stuff?" he growled.

Sammy couldn't talk. After all these years of talking, here he was in a spot. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. He trembled as though he had suddenly developed palsy.

"T-t-that drunk," he finally gasped. "He put these things into my hands."

The patrolman yanked the revolver from his hand and grasped him roughly by the arm.

"Oh, yeah," he returned. "He did, did he? Well, you come with me, and we'll tell the lieutenant just how the naughty man put the revolver into the little boy's hand. Come on, bum!"

And Sammy went to the station house. . . .

* * *

When they were through with Sammy he was put away for two years. The storekeeper said he had seen Sammy standing outside while his place was being robbed. And the jury believed him.

Sammy is still in jail. And the girl he loves refuses to write to him. She believes he broke his promise to go straight.

Well, he wanted to be a tough guy. . . .

XXI.

PARTY IN PHILADELPHIA

IT wasn't so long ago that Hal Hixon ran a night club in Philadelphia. If you read the sporting pages, you'll know Hal. He's better known as a fight manager than he is as a cabaret proprietor. That's the way he wants it, too—right now. And after you read this story, you'll understand why.

Exactly what induced Hal Hixon to enter the cafe business, I have no way of knowing. But enter it he did. He opened a beautiful little spot in the Pennsylvania city, put in a good band, hired a man to stage the average girl show—and expected to make money. His expectations, to put it mildly, miscarried.

The place didn't click. It didn't show the faintest signs that it would ever click. Hal changed his show and showed his change to the newspapers. Still no business. After losing money for two months, Hixon decided to close the joint and call it quits. He called it other things, too.

The closing night in Hixon's club was rather a dreary affair. If you've ever been in an unsuccessful cabaret on its last night, you'll know what I mean. If you haven't, you'll know what I mean anyhow.

It was a Saturday night. The waiters stood about in little groups and figured what they might have earned if business hadn't been bad. The man who rented the coatroom looked mournfully at his empty racks and told himself he was in a heluva racket. The girls in the revue waited anxiously for their dance routines to come to a conclusion so that they could go out somewhere and dance.

The atmosphere was one of mourning, which should please those popular song writers who are forever telling us that mourning will come. Hixon glanced at his watch and saw it was three in the morning. With a sigh, he decided to close.

At that moment in walked Mr. X. . . . .

Mr. X. was the kind of a guy that cartoonists use to illustrate the perfect sap on a spree. He was bald and his dome glistened like a reformer's eyes when he gets a chance to read a naughty book. He wore a baggy suit and a trick vest that fairly screamed at you. Furthermore, he appeared to be a trifle drunk.

Checking his hat, he patted the head waiter and slipped him a $5 bill. The head waiter almost fell through the floor. It was his first tip in a week.

"Howdy," shouted Mr. X. happily. "I want a nice front table. And say, maybe I could get me a gal or two, eh?"

The head waiter seated him and assured Mr. X. that he thought it could be arranged. Mr. X. slipped him another five spot—and soon had two girls from the revue seated at his table.

"Whee!" he howled as the girls sat down, "I'm on a real spree, I am. First night I've been out in a long, long time. What do you gals say to a little wine?"

The girls nodded vigorously. The mere mention of wine convinced both of them that they had a swell sucker on their hands. At a time like this, he was like manna from the heavens. And these dames were to the manna born.

Mr. X. summoned the head waiter.

"Say," he chirped, "is the boss around? I'd like to have a little talk with him. The girls and I want to do a little serious drinking. Ha, ha, ha!"

The head waiter walked over to Hixon's table.

"Boss," he cried, "it's gonna hand you a chuckle, but we finally landed a live one. And on the closing night, too!

"This guy wants wine. Looks like he'll go for plenty, too. You'd better come over and meet him."

Hixon walked over to Mr. X's table and introduced himself. Whereupon Mr. X. reached into his pocket and drew forth a wallet.

"Don't know whether you ever heard of me, sir," he said modestly, "but I am G—— W——, president of the L—— car company. I'm a pretty good guy when you get to know me. Yes, siree. Ha, ha, ha.

"Now here's the idea. I'm out on a spree for the first time in a long time. Just telling the girls here all about it. I'd like to buy a little wine if you'll sit down and join us. What say?"

Hixon looked over Mr. X's card and the credentials that he had willingly handed out. As he did so, his eyes nearly popped from his head.

For there was no doubt that he was the man he claimed to be. And he was the president of a motor car company that stood for millions of dollars. . . .

Hal placed a chair along side of Mr. X and draped an arm around the motor magnate's shoulders.

"Well, old boy," he smiled, "we never sell the stuff in here. But I can tell by your face that you're a regular guy. So I'll send out for a case of champagne for you.

"I want you to understand that I'm breaking a strict rule. But when a customer like you drops in, we're only too anxious to please. Hey there waiter!"

Within twenty minutes, two bottles of wine were being iced for Mr. X. As word flew around the cabaret that a prize chump was present, his table grew more and more crowded. Mr. X seemed to relish the situation.

"Say, waiter," he howled, "send a couple of bottles over to the boys in the band. And give the leader this twenty dollar note. Drink up, boys. This is sure a big night for your old uncle. Ha, ha, ha."

Before an hour had passed, the first case of wine was gone. Mr. X seemed to think nothing of it.

"Say, Hal,"—they had reached the first name stage long before—"let's have another case. Make it two more cases. No, make it three. The girls look thirsty. So am I. Ha, ha, ha."

At this point Hixon grew just a trifle nervous.

"Okay, old boy," he responded affably, "but here's the idea. I haven't any stuff in here, you see, and I have to send out for it. Your order will take most of my ready cash. And—"

Mr. X grinned comprehendingly. He reached for his check book.

"Hal, old pal, I get you. Don't be short, boy, don't be short. Nobody's ever short when I'm around. Here's a little check for the wine. That ought to take care of everything for the time being. Here you are, old man."

Hixon glanced at the check. It was for $2,000! . . . .

Time wore on. Never in all cabaret history was there a spender like this Mr. X. He handed out checks as though they meant absolutely nothing. The band had two of them for $500 each. The waiters had them. The girls had them. Hixon had a couple of them—each for a large figure.

Seven in the mornig. Eight. Ten. Sunday noon. Mr. X was still having a marvelous time. Most of the orchestra had been permitted to go to bed on the promise that they would return early that evening. Only the piano player was not allowed to leave. Mr. X said he simply had to have some music.

Hixon was growing extremely weary. But Mr. X was still as frisky as a colt.

"You see, Hal," he exclaimed. "I don't get out very often. When I do, whee! I'm gonna make a regular party out of this. Gonna stay up until tomorrow. And where do you think I'm gonna stay?

"You guessed it. Gonna stay right here with my pal, Hal. Yes, sir. Have some more wine."

It suddenly flashed through Hixon's mind that this Monday business was a good idea. If he could keep Mr. X in the place until the bank opened the following morning, everything would be jake. At the rate this man was going, the cabaret would have recovered most of its losses before morning.

So he lingered on. Four in the afternoon. Five. Seven. Eight. The band returned. But the doors to the cabaret were locked. No outside customers—if there should happen to be any—were to be admitted. This was strictly Mr. X's party. Until the bank opened and the checks cashed, the motor man was boss of the works.

How that night finally passed, Hixon will never know. But pass it did. At seven in the morning, Mr. X fell asleep at the table. For the time being, he was completely out of the picture. Which satisfied everybody.

Promptly at nine o'clock Hixon was on the wire. He spoke to one of the vice presidents with whom he was acquainted.

"Listen, Jim," he inquired nervously, " have you a depositor named G—— W——?"

"Sure," was the response that floated over the wire. "Why?"

"Great!" cried Hixon. "I have some big checks of his. I'll be right over."

Then came horrible words.

"Wait a minute," said the vice president hurriedly. "You say you have checks of his. When did he get out?"

"Get out?" stammered Hixon. "What do you mean—get out? He's in my place right now."

The vice-president's words were sharp and devastating.

"Don't tell me he's loose again. My God! Hold him there. I'll have a couple of keepers over there in a jiffy."

And he hung up on Hixon. . . . .

* * *

A short while later two guards from a private sanitarium on the outskirts of Philadelphia were in the cabaret. Mr. X. was dead to the world, and had to be carried out. And one of the guards explained the situation to Hixon.

"He's really the president of that car company," he stated. "Big guy, too. But daffy as they come. All he wants to do is give away money.

"At one time he damned near ruined the business. The family had to put him away. They let him keep a few dollars in the bank so that he can play with checks.

"But they ain't worth a quarter. The bank stops 'em as soon as they come in. Most of 'em don't get that far. Well, we gotta take him back now. Can't figure how he ever got away in the first place."

Hixon sat down on the deserted bandstand. He looked at the checks Mr. X had given him. He gazed around and saw the many champagne bottles—all of which had been paid for by him.

He thought of the manner in which he had been fooled by a name. Suddenly he jumped to his feet and ran after the guards.

"Hey," he shouted, "take me with you."

"What's the big idea?" asked one of the guards suspiciously.

"You gotta take me," insisted Hixon. "After what I did, I must be crazier than he is!" . . . .

XXII.

THE PAPER BOX KID

THE real name of the Paper-Box Kid is unknown to me. The reason for his nickname falls in the same category. As a matter of fact, I know nothing of his history except the facts that I relate to you here.

Some fifteen years ago, the Kid was in the death house at Sing Sing. The crime for which he was convicted has no place in this story. It must have been murder or he would not have been doomed to die. The Kid claimed, of course, that he was not guilty. Such boys always claim that. There never lived a criminal who didn't think he got a rough deal from the law.

The Paper-Box Kid had but two weeks to live when he did something that, in all of Sing Sing's history, had been accomplished only twice before. He escaped— just as, in 1892, two criminals under sentence of death had managed to wriggle from the old death house. Those two, however, were luckier than the Paper-Box Kid. They have never been seen to this day.

In the underworld at that time, they respected the Kid.

"He was wrong in a lot of ways," mused the man who unfolded the story to me, "but he was dead game. He was more than that. He was the gamest guy I ever met.

Nevertheless, game as he was, the Kid was in the death house. And sentenced to die within two weeks. Maybe that's the kind of a spot in which they land when they're just a little too game. . . . .

* * *

In the outer world, plans were afoot. Through those mysterious channels by which a criminal can always manage to communicate with those on the outside, a plan had been decided upon. The Kid was to attempt the most daring of all prison breaks—an escape from the death house.

The Kid had a buddy on the outside. Perhaps this buddy had been with the Kid on several jobs. Perhaps it was some mutual tie that bound them together. At any rate, it was the Kid's buddy who was to be the pivot man in the entire escape.

The plan was simple, if desperate. A gun was to be smuggled to the Kid at an appointed hour. With this gun he was to capture his cell guard and get out of the death house. Once past the first wall, he was to pass over the two others, shooting his way as he went. If he finally reached the outer yard and went through it safely, his buddy was to be waiting for him in a certain secluded spot.

The motor of a high-powered car would be running. The Kid would leap into the machine and change his clothes as the car dashed into the mountains. And after that—freedom!

It all sounds so simple in the telling. Like nothing at all, really. But read the plan over again and consider whether you, no matter how desperate your plight, would attempt it. The odds were 10,000 to one that the Kid would be dead before he reached the second wall.

The Kid beat the odds. If your memory is of a superior order, you will remember the headlines that greeted his sensational escape. It was only part of the story that did make the papers. . . .

On a certain day—at a certain hour—a bucket was requested by the Kid. His guard said he would get him one. A few minutes later, the Kid had his bucket. And in it was his revolver with a box of cartridges. So far, the plan had worked.

Outside, at a designated spot, that high-powered car was waiting. The Kid's buddy was at the wheel, his eyes staring at the surrounding shrubbery. His nerves were on edge. Why didn't the Kid hurry? Why wasn't there some sound? What had happened? It seemed to him as though he had been standing there for hours.

The buddy, you see, wasn't quite as game as the Paper-Box Kid. . . . .

* * *

The Kid fingered his gun. He clenched his fists tightly. He shook himself and stood erect. Now was the time. In ten minutes he would be free—or dead.

He screamed as though in terrible pain. Then he screamed again.

"O," he howled. "Help! Guard, where are you?

The guard came running.

"Help me!" shouted the Kid. "I'm caught in this trap here. Help me, for God's sake!"

The guard was puzzled. He hurriedly unlocked the door and stepped in.

"Trap?" he questioned, as he walked forward. "What kind of a trap are——"

That particular guard didn't say anything else for a long time. The butt of the Kid's pistol crashed down on his skull. The guard fell to the floor. The Kid seized both his keys and his gun and stepped from the cell.

He walked to the end of the corridor. Another guard saw him. But the Kid saw him first. The prisoner fired and the second guard dropped. The Kid stepped past him, ran through the little yard and leaped nimbly over the fence. He had passed the first wall!

Suddenly all hell broke loose. With the firing of the first shot the prisoners immediately sensed what was going on. And when the siren began to shriek, they were certain.

If you have ever heard a prison siren in full blast, you will know that it is the most blood-chilling sound we have. There is no way of putting a description of that sound on paper. Sufficient to relate that, when it blows at Sing Sing, the very ground of the surrounding country can be felt to tremble.

The Kid had no chance to think of sirens or consider their significance. There were two guards between him and the second wall. He got the first one. But the second one was on top of him. For perhaps twenty seconds they struggled.

This guard was game, too. Almost as game as the Kid. The Kid was about to bash his head with the pistol butt when the guard twisted his head and caught one of the Kid's fingers between his teeth. Just as the weapon came down, the guard bit with all his strength.

The Kid leaped up. He looked at his finger for a fleeting second and a sickish feeling ran through him. But he fought it off and scaled the second wall. He was in the prison yard. Only one more wall to go.

They were firing at the Kid now. Firing from every angle. Madly the convict dashed along, firing as he went. A bullet grazed his shoulder. Another scratched his leg. He reached the wall and dropped over. He was clear of the prison.

The Kid dashed to the river, pulling at his clothes as he ran. When he reached the dock, he pulled off the last of his garments. Standing there in the nude, he threw the garments in a heap and placed his revolver on top.

Then instead of jumping into the water, he retraced his steps and bounded into the shrubbery. He had done this to fool the guards. They would take it for granted that he had gone into the river and they would search for him along that front. Meanwhile, he would be safe in his buddy's car where clothing awaited him.

The Paper-Box Kid had accomplished the impossible. He had escaped from the death house at Sing Sing! . . .

In the car sat a man whose face was ashen. His hands shook as though he had the palsy. The noise of the siren chilled him to the bone. Each revolver shot brought more fright into his eyes.

Finally he could stand it no longer. With a hurried motion, he shifted his gears. The motor roared. The car shot forward. In an instant it had disappeared down the road.

He was driving away from that siren as fast as he could go. The noise of it had terrorized him. He was too frightened to wait any longer. All he knew now was to escape from that siren.

The last link in the chain of freedom had snapped. When the escaped convict stepped out at the appointed spot, the car was gone.

The Kid's buddy had failed him. . . . .

They picked up the Kid that night. They found him just outside the prison hospital. He was laughing hysterically.

Laughing, mind you. The prison authorities couldn't understand it. One of them finally nodded.

"The man is insane," he declared. "The strain of what he has gone through has snapped his brain. We'll have to keep him here for awhile, care for his finger and then have a sanity commission examine him."

The authority was right. The Paper-Box Kid was insane—but only temporarily. The thought that his buddy had deserted him had done the trick. But when he awakened in the morning, his mind was clear once again. He soon discovered that they considered him insane. And he saw his chance once again. He would stay insane!

They put him behind bars and he raged up and down as so many maniacs do. He muttered crazy words and placed a demented expression in his eyes. And all the while his mind was busy. . . .

The sanity commission appeared before his cell. One man —evidently the leader—stepped forward.

"Gentlemen," he announced, " I am convinced this man is a hopeless lunatic. I'm going to prove it to you. I'm going to light a box of matches in his left hand. If he drops the box, he will be sane. Only a lunatic could stand such pain."

The investigator lit the box of matches and put it into the Kid's left hand. The flame burnt his flesh to a crisp. It was a hideous torture. But the Kid merely grinned foolishly.

"You see, gentlemen," cried the investigator. "I told you that only a lunatic could stand such pain in his left hand. Now I'll prove my point conclusively. I'll light a match and put it on his right hand. The minute it gets near him, he will scream with pain. All lunatics do that."

He lit the match. It had not touched the Kid when he gave a terrific yell of pain.

The investigator nodded and stepped forward.

"Kid," he said softly, "you're a game man. We know now that you are as sane as any man living. You held that flaming box of matches in your hand because you heard me say that only a lunatic would do it. As a matter of fact, a lunatic would not be able to do it.

"You jumped from the one match on your right hand. That proved my point completely and I'm sure these gentlemen will agree with me. As a matter of fact, we planned the entire thing beforehand."

The Kid nodded and dropped on the edge of his iron bed.

"You win, buddy," he murmured tiredly. "It was a dirty trick, but I guess it's your business. You win." . . .

The Paper-Box Kid went to his death a short time later. He had been too game. . . .

XXIII.

STIFLED

BETTY was a dancer in a Broadway cafe. The usual type. Cute in her way. Blonde, bobbed hair. Blue eyes. About nineteen. Not very brilliant. But who cared about that?

Due to bad business, her cafe suddenly closed its doors. Betty found herself as out of work as the ex-Kaiser. The little money she had was soon gone. Her mamma had gone to keep the angels company and her father was ill in a small town in Pennsylvania. She needed money now. Needed it badly.

One afternoon, as a last resort, she wandered into the offices of Mr. Nils T. Granlund. In case you do not know your Broadway, permit me to tell you that Mr. Granlund has been in touch with things Times Square for many years. As a radio, cabaret and publicity expert, he has assisted in the development of more stage and screen stars than any other man in the business.

When it comes to little chorines of nineteen who are out of work, Mr. Granlund is quite the soul of generosity. Thus when Betty told him of her troubles. the benevolent Mr. Grandlund was touched—in more ways than one. He helped her with a few dollars and wrote a small piece about her case for a column he was then turning out for Variety, the great theatrical trade paper.

Some ten days after the story was published in Variety, Mr. Granlund received a letter and a check from the northwest. The check was for $30. And the letter was from Frederick B——, of Portland, Oregon.

"Dear Sir," the letter read, "will you kindly forward the enclosed check to the little chorus girl you wrote about this week? I can afford to help her and I hope she will accept it in the spirit in which it is offered."

And so forth and so on. Granlund turned both the letter and the check over to Betty. Did she cash the check? Don't be silly. . . . .

* * *

Betty sat down and wrote Fred a letter 'way up in Portland, Ore. She thanked him from the bottom of her little heart and threw plenty of gush into her reply. The result was another letter from Fred. And, what is more important, another check.

So time rolled on. Sight unseen, Fred had sent Betty enough money for a coat to keep her warm and an apartment to keep her comfortable. Don't tell me there are no such men. This one actually existed.

Some five months following his first letter, Fred was asked to attend some sort of a convention in Baltimore, Md. He traveled across the country for two reasons. The first one was that he wanted to see what Betty looked like. The second, which was his excuse to himself, was the convention.

To make a long story as long as I can, Fred came on to New York, took one look at her baby face and forgot all about his convention. He fell madly in love with her and it was no time at all until he asked to take her back to Portland in order to make her his wife.

Betty did not know what to do. She asked some of her friends about it.

"Gee," she cried, "he's got plenty of dough. One of the biggest lumber guys in the west, I understand. But I don't like the idea of leaving Broadway. I just don't like that."

One of her friends took her seriously.

"Listen, Kid," offered the pal, "this street will get you nowhere. You've got the chance of the lifetime. If this guy loves you and you like him at all, grab him and thank your lucky stars you got away from Broadway.

"You almost starved once. Don't try it again. Grab this bird, honey. Grab him fast. Settle down out west and have your car, your home, your husband and your chauffeur. Don't be a fool. Get away from Broadway. You'll be a million times better off in the end."

As a result of this continual hammering, Betty decided that marriage to Fred was the best thing for her. She accepted his proposal.

And the very next day, with Fred treading on air, he stepped on the train for Portland, Ore., with his none-too-blushing bride-to-be. . . .

* * *

Less than two weeks after her departure, Betty was back in New York. She hadn't married Fred—because she didn't stay in Portland long enough. She had remained in that city just one day before she came back to Broadway. Very evidently she didn't care for Portland—a city where there is sunshine. And air. And freedom.

Now she was back in a cabaret, telling the girls of her experiences.

"What wuz the matter, Betty?" asked one of the girls. "Don'tcha care for the wide, open spaces?"

Betty paused for a second before answering. She looked around her. The smoke was so thick, it might have been a congressman's skull. Fumes of cheap perfume and bum gin filled the air.

"God, no!" she responded emphatically, " I couldn't stand it in Oregon. I had to get back to Broadway. The air up there stifled me!" . . . .

XXIV.

LITTLE ELI

SITTING in Harlem the other dawn, they told me the story of Little Eli, the colored Robin Hood. Eli is dead now, but they tell me that the true story of this man's life has never been written. And so I write it here.

Among the colored folks of this city, the memory of Little Eli will linger for many years to come. For Eli was the baddest of the bad.

His guns would flash on any occasion and his fists would often fly for no reason at all. He held murder cheaply and thieving was his occupation. But all that he gained he gave away. And no one can really ever hate a man like that.

They told me this story in a colored cabaret. Where men and women hold each other tightly and dance the hours away. Where the lights flash, the shrill voices chant and the band plays on and on. . .

* * *

Away back in 1904, when 27th St. and 6th Ave. was just about the toughest spot in New York, two colored men stood on that location and looked angrily at each other. One man's name was Wash. The other was known as Smokymoke.

The conversation between these two came to an abrupt end. Wash's fist shot forth, connected with Smokymoke's chin and the latter fell to the ground. Wash laughed loudly and walked on up the street.

No more than thirty seconds later, a very thin and very short colored man walked up to Smokymoke, who was still resting easily on the ground. The stranger propped Smokymoke up with one hand and asked a very strange question.

"Who," he asked crisply, "is the toughest feller in this part of the town?"

The beaten man looked at the newcomer through bloody eyes. It was a strange question, but this was a strange neighborhood—and Smokymoke knew better than to ask questions. He pointed down the street in the general direction of Wash.

"There he goes," he murmured, "it's the feller that jus' walloped me. His name's Wash and there ain't no one 'roun here who dares to fool aroun' with him. If you're lookin' fo' trouble, jus' fool aroun' with Wash."

The stranger dropped Smokymoke and walked hastily after Wash. Reaching him, the stranger grasped Wash by the right arm and swung him about.

"Feller," he cried, "they tell me yo' the toughest man around these parts. Ah wants yo' to meet me pussenally. Mah name's Eli Lucas. Ah jus' come in from Louisville where ah was tagged with the name o' Little Eli.

"From now on, yo' is no longer the toughest feller aroun' here. Yo' is the second toughest. An' any time yo' wants to shoot it out with Little Eli, jus' let me know."

Wash broke into a hysterical laugh. Surely this little runt could not be serious. He reached out one ponderous arm to grab the stranger by the collar.

Wash had done the wrong thing—but he didn't realize it until some five hours later. For, fast as Wash was, Eli was even faster. The arm was shoved aside, a fist flew upward and true. A pistol butt was lodged against a skull with a sickening thud. And Wash was on the ground, completely out.

The little man looked at the fallen figure, grunted contemptuously and then walked away. Little Eli had introduced himself to New York . . .

* * *

Just where Eli came from originally, no one has ever been able to learn. Some ten years before his arrival in New York, at the age of twenty-one, he first came to the attention of the police in Louisville, Ky.

Eli, it seemed, had pushed himself into a slight argument with another colored gentleman over a lady. The fact that the lady was the other man's girl meant nothing in Eli's young life. Eli liked her—and when the other man sought to argue, Eli forthwith plunged a knife where it did not belong. The other man went to the hospital and Eli went to jail.

Eli, so the story runs, did not find jail to his liking. He did not mind the confinement, but he hated the hard labor they imposed upon him. It was his philosophy that work was the one thing that man should do his best to avoid. Accordingly —and this portion of the story is always told in bated breath— Eli seized a knife one morning and deliberately chopped away the middle finger of his left hand.

He lost his finger but he won his point. They gave him no more manual labor. When his hand healed, they tried every means to get him to use his remaining nine fingers. They punished him severely. But Eli yielded to every beating rather than force himself to work.

It was one of these beatings that made Eli commit his first murder. And, strangely enough, that murder gave him his freedom.

A keeper, finding time heavy upon his hands, sought to torment Eli in the latter's cell. Opening the door, he started to cuff the prisoner about.

Eli, desperate and enraged, fought back. The keeper drew his gun. Eli lunged forward. The gun fell to the stone floor. Eli reached it first. A shot. Another. And the keeper fell, dead.

An investigation followed the murder. It was probably the only investigation in history that ever amounted to anything. Eli showed his bruises and told of his beatings. The Governor's daughter, so the story goes, took an interest in the case.

Eli, as a result, received no extra time for the killing of the keeper. Instead, when some two years passed, he was pardoned completely . . .

From 1902 to 1911, Eli made New York his home. And if ever a man was eccentric to an amazing degree, that man was Eli.

With money in his pocket, Little Eli was a friend to all the world. He would walk around the colored section, distributing money to those whom he thought were in need. But when he was broke, Eli was the nastiest individual that ever stole a dime from a blind man's cup.

The man seemed to have no conscience. He would do whatever struck his fancy, regardless of the consequences to others. They tell of the time he marched into Baron Wilkins' old place one evening and strode to the middle of the floor.

"I came heah," he announced with gusto, "to do some shootin'."

The manager leaped forward.

"Please doan't start no trouble, Eli" he murmured shakily, "please doan't do no shootin' in heah."

Eli pushed him aside.

"I came heah," he repeated laconically, "to do some shootin'. An' there ain't nobody gonna tell me to stop."

Pulling forth a wicked looking gun, he fired six shots. Three in the walls and three in the ceiling. Then he put the gun back in his pocket.

"Tha's all folks," he said. And, grinning happily, he marched forth in search of a new eccentricity. . .

Most of Eli's money came from the dice games which were always in progress in the colored section of those days. At any of these games Eli was always an unwelcome visitor. But they had no way of keeping him out. Any man who knows his Harlem will be glad to tell you that Little Eli was the most feared man of his generation in this city.

During the progress of these dice games Eli had one certain way of always keeping in funds. When—and if—his own bankroll would disappear, Eli would fix his eyes on one of the winners.

"Say, Joe," he would murmur softly, "len' me twenty, will yuh?"

The money was generally in his hands immediately. The donor knew it was gone forever—but what was he to do? Better to be alive without twenty than dead with a million.

In connection with these dice games, Eli had another little trick that caused shivers to run up and down the spines of the men who ran the games. In those days, when a player went broke, it was no unusual sight for the loser to remove his suit and get so much for it from the house, so that the player might continue.

The suit was hung neatly away in a closet until such time as the player was able to pay the money back and take it away. The same thing applied to shoes and any other apparel that the player might want to risk. Empty barrels were probably at a premium after any of those games.

When Eli was flush and not in the mood for gaming, he might still be expected to appear at some game during the night. It was then only a matter of a few minutes until he would yank forth a gun and level it at the proprietor.

"Wha' for you wanta keep these poor fellers' clothes for?" he would inquire blandly, pointing the while at the shivering colored men who had lost everything but their hopes for the future.

The proprietor generally knew exactly what he meant. He would walk to the closet, unlock it and give back the clothes to the luckless gamesters. They would accept them eagerly, put them on and then make a beeline for the nearest exit.

And Eli, smiling happily at the thought of a good deed well done, would watch the game for a while, take up a collection for some one in need, and depart . . .

The years drifted by—with Eli still the monarch of all he invaded. The dice games were still his favorite form of amusement. But there was trouble in the air.

The proprietors of these games knew that they would be far, far better off with Eli out of the way. That man was a nuisance. But what to do about it? Who among them would be bold enough to make the first move?

Johnny Jones decided to try it. When Eli arrived at the game that night, he was barred out. Eli pulled his gun and Jones went down with a bullet through his left shoulder.

On his way home, Eli tarried only long enough to shoot at and wound two policemen who were chasing him. He finally surrendered and was sentenced to nine years in Sing Sing prison.

The rich of Harlem breathed easier. But the poor were not so sure . . .

* * *

In six years or so, Eli came out of prison. Conditions, he found, had changed. The dice games were no longer wide open. Harlem was a huge community, growing ever larger. Lawlessness, except in isolated cases, was very much a thing of the past.

Eli looked the situation over and then took himself to Saratoga Springs for the racing season. There, he figured, he might find some real excitement. He found it.

Sell Hazelwood had always been a pal of his. They met each other for the first time in years at a Saratoga gambling house. Eli, slipping back to his old ways, asked Hazelwood for money. Hazelwood shook his head.

One word led to another. Threats. Curses. Little Eli lunged forward. Hazelwood whipped out a revolver. And Eli grinned.

"Be careful, man," he breathed, "yo' is pointing that gun at the toughest feller in these parts. Be careful or I'll kill yo' sure."

Hazelwood held his gun steadily.

"Eli," he murmured, "there never was a tough guy yet that didn't meet somebody tougher some day. Watch out how yo' talk to me."

Eli stepped forward. A gun barked once. Twice. Three times.

And Eli fell—dead. . . .

* * *

There you have the story of little Eli, the strangest man that Harlem ever knew.

I've told it to you just as I heard it in a colored cabaret. Where the lights flash, the shrill voices chant and the band plays on and on. . .

XXV.

IT WAS five o'clock on the morning of March 19, 1926. Five men sat at a table in a cabaret on West 52nd st. The name of the cabaret was the Club Chantee.

Two of the men were Italians. Another two were Jewish. The fifth—and the spender of the party—was a thin, small man with hard narrow eyes. They called him Dick.

Dick was always welcomed here with open arms. He threw money away with a lavish hand. A hundred. Two hundred. Three hundred. A thousand. Money, seemingly, meant nothing to him.

The girls of the club smiled prettily at him. The waiters bowed before him. The band played furiously at his command. The show became a show just as frequently as he requested.

For Dick was a spender. And a spender in night life is king. . . .

There was none in that club who knew Dick's business. Some said he was a millionaire bootlegger. Others claimed he owned a string of horses in the west. Still others insisted that millions had been willed to him. But who really cared? He had the money. That's all they ever have to know—on Broadway.

Thus, four nights of the week, each and every week, Dick was the king of this empty domain. The best was his. But always his eyes were hard and cold. Always his mouth was set in a cruel, firm line. Only once in a great, great while did he talk too much.

But he talked too much on this night. The early morning of March 19, 1926. . . .

"Wine!" cried Dick. "I want more wine. Better wine. Nobody can drink more and better wine than I can. Bring more wine. Better wine!"

The boss of the Chantee walked to the table.

"You have been drinking the best wine in New York, Mr. Dick," he cried. "I get it only for you. It costs me almost as much as the price for which I sell it to you. There is no better wine in New York than the wine I serve you."

Dick looked up. He grunted.

"You call that good wine?" he asked. "The wine I have just been drinking?"

The boss nodded vigorously. His pride was hurt.

"The very best," he exclaimed. "It cannot be possible, Mr. Dick, that you ever tasted any that was better? You hurt me, Mr. Dick, when you say things like that."

Dick rose to his feet. Now his pride was hurt.

"Listen," he cried, "I have some wine in my hotel room that's got this stuff trimmed a mile. My wine is better than yours. I'm going to prove it to you. You two fellows come with me. The rest of you stay here.

"I'll be back in ten minutes. My wine is better than yours. You'll see. Just ten minutes."

Dick stepped into his high powered car that was waiting at the curb. A shifting of gears and he was on his way to his hotel. . . .

Some eight minutes later, Dick emerged from his hotel. He placed two bottles in the back of the car. Once again a shifting of gears, and he was off in the direction of the Club Chantee.

Dick did not care much about speed laws. Wasn't he a spender? Down through the park at forty miles an hour.

Forty-five. Fifty. Fifty-five. Almost in front of the club now. And two policemen stepped up to the car.

Where was he going, they wanted to know? Dick smiled. He dug into his pocket and drew forth a $50 bill.

"Here," he cried to the first policeman, "go get yourself a cigar."

The patrolman grew suspicious. A $50 bribe! There must be something wrong here. Now if it had been a five spot—

"Wait a minute," cried the patrolman, "what's in the back o' that car there? O—wine, eh? Bootleggin', eh? You better step outa that car for a minute 'til we see what else you fellows have in there."

Dick's answer was to push the patrolman off the side of the car. He threw his car into high and attempted to flee. He did not get far. Two detectives hove into sight. Shots were fired. Dick surrendered.

He was arrested. So, too, were his companions. . . .

Dick never returned to the Club Chantee. His real name was Richard Reese Whittemore. If you are student of criminology, you will recall that name. The head of a great robber band, the police had been searching for him for many months with no success. But now they had him. And a short time later, he was hung by the neck until he was dead.

The two men who rode in the car with him are each serving long prison terms. The two men who waited in the cabaret were also seized by the police. They received forty years each from a kindly old judge. And the owner of the club, whose wine did not suit the fastidious taste of Richard Reese Whittemore, is also gone. He was killed a few weeks later.

Thus, the six men who sat around that table on the morning of March 19, 1926, are all away. Two of them are gone forever. And it is hardly likely that any of the other four will ever come back. . . . .

XXVI.

THE SPENDER

THIS story concerns a composite character. There are many like him. There have been many like him the whole world over. He has lived in ancient Babylonia. He played in Rome in Caesar's time. He lives today in Paris and in Calcutta and in Tokio and in Budapest and in Port Said.

He lives on Broadway, too. We call him the Broadway Spender . . .

* * *

The Broadway Spender glanced into his mirror. He smiled with satisfaction for he looked well this evening. It seemed to him that he was thirty-five at most. Plenty of hair there yet—and that expert massage had done much for those wrinkles. Nobody would ever guess that he was close to fifty-five. He felt certain of that.

This was to be a regular evening for him. Well, a bit more than regular because he was going out with a Swell Girl. He smiled again as he thought of her.

A little bit young for him she was—but a Swell Girl just the same. Only nineteen. He had been introduced to her at a party and she had seemed very much impressed when she heard his name. And why shouldn't she have been? Wasn't he the Broadway Spender? Wasn't he the man of millions? Wasn't he the gayest sport on the Great White Way?

He had taken the Swell Girl out several times. She was a poor kid who had been able to land but one chorus job and was now out of work. He patted his tie and felt quite happy about the situation. The Swell Girl was legitimate prey for him. He would buy her plenty of gowns and let her use his Rolls Royce.

And then, when he grew tired, there would be other Swell Girls. . . .

They went first to dinner. There is but one place for the Broadway Spender to dine—and that is the most expensive speakeasy in town.

The doorman bowed low before the Spender and his Swell Girl. The big man was pleased. He handed the doorman a $5 bill and threw out his chest.

"That's the kind of service I always get," he asserted. "They all know me."

They were soon seated. Two captains and three waiters hovered about their table.

"Bring," said the Spender, "the finest meal you can serve. Never mind the price. And chill two bottles of the best wine in the house. Be sure it's properly iced."

As they began their dinner the Spender spoke.

"You see, my sweet one," he murmured, "how happy you can be with me? I can give you everything of the best. They all bow to me. I have the money and the power to make them cringe. I am a very successful man."

He gulped a glass of wine and placed a pudgy paw on the Swell Girl's delicate hand. The Swell Girl turned away . . .

When dinner was over they went to a show. A very successful musical show. They sat in the front row and the stars recognized him immediately. They mentioned his name several times and the Broadway Spender swelled with pride.

During the intermission he paraded the Swell Girl around the lobby. He sensed the fact that people were pointing at him and speaking his name in awed tones.

They returned to their seats for the second half of the show. The word had gone around. All the chorines knew where he was sitting. They smiled at him. That third one from the left looked good to him. He made a mental note to send her flowers and perfume the next day.

They left before the show was over and were driven to a big night club. The Broadway Spender tapped the floor of his machine with his stick.

"This is a very beautiful automobile," he told the Swell Girl. "It cost me $30,000." . . . .

At the night club they placed a table upon the floor for him. He ordered wine again. Plenty of wine. He sent some to another table. Not that he liked the man at the other table—but there were two very pretty girls sitting there.

He danced with the Swell Girl and held her tightly.

The Broadway Spender prided himself on his dancing. He prided himself on the fact that he could go on for hours. Sometimes he felt very weary. But he kept dancing just the same.

The wine was taking effect. He sat down with the Swell Girl and placed an arm around her. He swallowed another drink.

"Kid," he muttered. "I'm going to tell you something that's going to make you very happy. I'm in love with you. I want you very much."

The Swell Girl did not have time to answer. A Young Boy stepped to the table and was smiling at her. The Swell Girl shook hands with the Young Boy and introduced him to the Broadway Spender. He was a boy who had been in that show with her a short time before.

"How about going to Harlem?" asked the Young Boy. "The three of us. I know a great spot. What say?"

The Broadway Spender was tired. Too much champagne, too. But he agreed to go. No Young Boy could stand up longer than he . . . .

They knew the Broadway Spender up in Harlem. Head waiters bowed to him just as they did downtown. He sent $100 over to the orchestra and gave each entertainer two $20 bills. He was drinking wine again. Glass after glass.

Time went on. It was growing late. Almost seven o'clock in the morning. The Swell Girl was dancing with the Young Boy. Dance after dance. The Broadway Spender didn't like that.

"Get rid of that Young Boy," whispered the Broadway Spender to her. "I'll take you home very soon. And don't forget what I told you. I'm crazy about you. And I've got millions."

The Broadway Spender left the table for a moment. When he came back the Swell Girl was gone. She had left with the Young Boy . . .

* * *

At nine o'clock in the morning the Broadway Spender was sitting in Central Park. He had dismissed his Rolls Royce and was sitting on a bench. His eyes were heavy. His cheeks sagged. His collar was wilted. His head ached.

A little girl passed with her nurse. The child was gay and healthy and happy.

"Oh, nursie," cried the child, "look at the funny man in the evening clothes."

"Hush, child," said the nurse anxiously. "Not so loud. He's an important man. That's the Broadway Spender."

The little girl laughed heartily.

"Don't be foolish, nurse," she murmured. "Can't you see what he is? He's just a tired old man." . . .

XXVII.

A DEFENDER OF THE SEX

JAMES JONES was a gentleman. You must understand that thoroughly first of all. Born in this country of splendid people, he was taught the customs of a gentleman at a very early age. He was taught to respect women. He was taught to respect his parents. In other words, he was slightly different from the boy and girl of today.

When the war broke out, James Jones was a broker. It didn't take him five minutes to make up his mind. Before any of his friends fully realized that we were in the war, James Jones had enlisted. He was one of the first to land in France.

After the war was over, James Jones returned to the United States as a captain. He had an enviable war record and many scars to show. But, for all this, he was a very different man. The war had done something to him. His brain was not the same.

On the surface, he was the same man who had marched away. It took his old friends but a moment, however, to realize that something was wrong. He couldn't remember things. He couldn't remember faces. He couldn't remember names.

In one respect only was he exactly as before. He was still the perfect gentleman . . .

* * *

James Jones could do nothing. He went back to his brokerage office and tried to resume his old job. It was no use. He had forgotten everything—and he could never remember.

His parents had gone. What little they had left had been gobbled up by lawyers. Unless some one would help him he would become a public charge.

Someone did help him. An old friend. Not a wealthy man, but a chap in comfortable circumstances. He hired James Jones as his secretary. A secretary with no work to do. Like many others I might mention.

There wasn't much money in this job. Just a home, good food to eat and a little pocket money on the side. So Jones, with his mind in its strange state, was perfectly satisfied.

The years wore on. Jones had no women friends. He never dreamt of having any. Well, come to think of it, who am I to say anything like that? Perhaps he did dream of having women around him. What I mean to imply was that he never did have any.

Then, one late afternoon, something happened. Jones was riding home in the subway. The train was mobbed with people who were rushing home so that they might eat and have strength to rush away again the following morning.

A girl was being insulted. The average New Yorker doesn't mind a thing like that in the subways any more. But Jones was different. Maybe it was because he didn't ride in subways very often.

He saw the girl's face. He heard her murmurs of protest. When the train jerked to a halt and the doors swung open, the girl stepped from the car. So did the man who was insulting her. So did Jones.

He heard the man talk. He saw the girl walk away. He saw the man follow and clutch at her arm. He didn't wait any longer. He stepped up and swung a powerful blow. The man dropped like a log.

The girl threw him a grateful look. The crowds came running. She looked into Jones's eyes—and saw something there. Something helpless. She took his arm.

"Come," she murmured hastily. "Come quickly. Otherwise there will be questions. And trouble. Fast now."

Jones walked with her. Not only did he walk from the station—but he walked the four blocks to her rooming house. She had never met a man like this. He was so simple. So honest. So real. And so much the gentleman.

Before he left she asked if he would come to her room for dinner the following Saturday. He nodded eagerly. And she left him . . .

Saturday found James Jones on the way to the girl's room. In his pocket were fifty-five cents. He had had sixty when he left his home—but five cents had gone for carfare.

There was a florist's shop on the way. Jones looked longingly into the window. A true gentleman would never call upon a lady without bringing some sort of a gift. Jones knew that. He stepped inside.

The prices were terrific. This bouquet would be eight dollars. That one would be ten. Jones removed five cents from his meagre store of money and slipped it into his shoe. He wanted to be sure he had enough money to get home.

He pointed to a lone rose in the window. He asked the price. The florist said it would be one dollar.

"I can't afford that," said Jones, "but I can give you fifty cents. Won't you take that? Please?"

The florist finally sold it at that price. So Jones left with the lone rose as a gift for the girl. Always the gentleman.

Never did two humans enjoy a dinner more. There was no caviar and no pheasant. Merely a bit of fruit and some chops and some coffee and some cake. For this girl was a poor girl. And she could afford no more.

As they ate they talked. Never was Jones in more brilliant form. His memory seemed suddenly to have returned. He talked of the war. He recited experiences. He made the girl laugh. He made the girl happy. He made himself happy.

And in the center of the table, as though proud to be in such company, stood that lonesome, red rose . . .

* * *

Two hours passed. They passed with such rapidity that it seemed but two minutes since James Jones had arrived. The girl glanced at the clock.

"It's getting late," she said. "I think you had better go now."

Jones arose. He bowed low.

"You have been wonderful," he murmured simply. "You have been charming. You have been sweet. You have brought an evening into my life that I will never forget. Is there anything that I can do before I depart?"

The girl smiled. She slipped on an apron.

"Yes," she replied. "You can carry those few dishes to my little kitchen behind those curtains. Then you must say good night."

Jones hastened to comply with her wishes. When the table had been cleared and the lone rose stood upon it, he stood behind the curtains with the girl for a second. He kissed her hand.

"Good night," he said.

"Good night," she said.

Jones stepped out from behind the curtains. He opened her purse and slipped ten dollars into his own pocket. He took the rose and placed it tenderly in his buttonhole. And then he walked quietly into the night . . .

XXVIII.

OF NO IMPORTANCE

EVERYBODY has a story. Be the man a tramp, a thief, a lawyer or a bank president, there is an interesting yarn about him buried somewhere in his life. That's my story. And if I'm stuck with it, that's my business.

I have often been criticized for the type of story I present. Some time ago, for instance, a college damsel came in for an interview and wound up by giving me a lecture.

"Mr. Hellinger," she said severely, "I don't think you are making the most of your opportunity. You are forever writing about drunkards or dope fiends or people who are down and out.

"Why not devote some of your time and effort to people who have made names for themselves? People of class and refinement. They have stories, too. Better stories than most of the characters you present."

In one way the young lady was right. Successful people certainly have stories. But whether they are better stories than the type I so frequently write about is a question that is open to argument.

A millionaire, for example, gives away $1,000,000 so that a college can build another building to be named after him. He came from nowhere and winds up with many millions. A good story? Of course.

And yet, does it make better reading than the story of Joseph Schoen, who is one of ten elevator operators in an office building on Broadway? Joseph Schoen never had a million to give to a college. He never will. Still in all, Joseph Schoen has a story.

Maybe you'll agree . . .

* * *

Shortly after the war Joseph Schoen arrived in this country from Germany. About thirty-five years of age, Schoen had $50 in his pocket and a violin in his hand. He had come to New York to conquer the musical field. Sure.

Back in a small town in Germany, Joseph Schoen had left his wife and his little baby girl. The child was about sixteen months of age. The wife and child meant the world to the man with the $50. But it was the same old story.

Times were black in Germany. It would be many years before things would be normal again. These were dark days for a young musician to conquer a nation. Yet he must begin to struggle upward at once.

So there was the usual discussion with the wife. The usual promise to send for her and the baby as soon as America had recognized him. The usual tears. The usual goodbyes.

And Joseph Schoen came to America . . .

In addition to the $50, he had two letters in his pocket. Letters to music critics from a prominent violinist in Germany. These letters told of his skill with the violin. They also told of his great need for immediate work. Would the critics try and assist him?

Strangely enough, the critics did. They heard him play and they went out of their way to help him. A sponsor was secured and this unknown man gave a concert on a Sunday night. The critics were extremely kind to him the next day. And while he had made but little money, he sat at home the next night and patted his violin.

"You have brought me much happiness," he murmured caressingly, "and you will bring me much more. Soon now I will be able to send for my wife and my baby. You are serving me well."

That one concert, however, was Schoen's lone hour of individual triumph. The one who had sponsored him had other things to think of. Perhaps the violinist had been somewhat of a disappointment to him. At any rate, he declined to sponsor him further.

Armed with the favorable clippings, Schoen did the next best thing. He secured work with a large orchestra and proved very acceptable. His income was not large, but it was steady. Within a year he had enough money to send for his wife and daughter.

Then came the blow. He arrived home one night and found a cable. The news was horribly brief.

"Your wife in automobile crash this afternoon," it read, "and died immediately. Cable instructions."

For a long while Joseph Schoen sat silently in a chair. The blow had been terrific. Then he turned slowly and glanced at his violin.

"If it were not for you," he murmured slowly, "I would still be in Germany. Then maybe this accident would never have happened. And I would still have my wife. It might never have happened." . . .

Schoen cabled to Germany and ordered that his child be brought to him in America. As soon as it could be arranged he would send passage money for the child and a friend to bring her.

Thus, when the child was not quite three years of age, she was brought across the ocean. Joseph Schoen clasped her in his arms. Here she belonged—and here she would stay . . .

The child was everything to him. He loved her as both father and mother. His every thought was of this child.

Gone now were the thoughts of a great concert career. Gone were the dreams of conquering the concert world with his violin. All he asked now was a respectable living for his child and himself.

And so the years went by. When the girl was old enough to go to school, he went over her lessons with her. He never thought of going anywhere without his daughter. Unless the orchestra played somewhere that it was impossible to take her, the girl sat and waited for her father to finish his work.

About four years ago, Schoen came home from an engagement. With him was a large German doll that he had bought that afternoon. He wanted to surprise his child. So, before entering his apartment, he left the doll in the hall below.

He placed his violin on a table as the child ran to kiss him. He held her off.

"We are going to have a guest," he announced. "Another little girl. You will wait here. I will bring her to you."

Schoen went down to get the doll. He climbed the stairs with the doll in his arms and a smile on his face. He entered the apartment once again. The child was not there. His violin was gone too.

He laughed and called her name. He had joked with her. Well, she was joking with him. He called her name again. No answer. He frowned. He rushed into the bedroom. The window was open. He looked below—

A minute later he held her in his arms. She had fallen four stories to the courtyard. His violin was near her—broken in a thousand pieces. He felt strangely sick as the child gasped a few last words.

"Sorry, daddy. So sorry. Playing joke on you. Going to hide violin outside the window. It fell. I fell too. I'm —sorry—daddy. I'm. . . ."

* * *

Joseph Schoen never played the violin again. He's an elevator runner now. One of ten. Up and down the whole day long. Just existing. He seldom talks to anyone. People pay little attention to him. They think he's pretty dull.

I guess he is, too. He never gave a million to charity. Not much of a story in him . . .

XXIX.

TOO MUCH SEX

HERE is an unusual story of Broadway. It would make a good play. And then, although it was founded on fact, people would leave the theatre and say: "O, it was all right. But such things couldn't really happen."

Such things can happen. They can happen very easily to a girl whom we will call Joan and a boy whose name can be John. To understand the story of Joan and John we must first take them apart and see what made them tick. The rest will be easy.

Both Joan and John worked in a small publishing house not very far from Broadway. The girl, who was about twenty years of age, earned $25 a week as a secretary. The boy, who was about twenty-six, earned $35 for his week's labor.

Joan was in love with John. And John was in love with Joan. Could anything be much worse?

The girl was a strange creature. Maybe you'd term her a nymphomaniac. But I wouldn't quite go so far as that. Let's say she was oversexed. Yes, that's the proper word. Oversexed. She was charitable with the boys and charity covers a multitude of grins. . .

* * *

Joan was not a bad girl. Bad, perhaps, in the eyes of the world. But in her heart, she did not feel that she was doing wrong. Purity meant nothing to her except a name on a milk bottle. Ever since she was fifteen she had taken love where she found it. And she found it quite often.

When she was seventeen, her father died and left nothing to his family but the very best intentions. Since intentions could not be cooked and served, it was necessary for Joan to go to work.

She found this job in the publishing house and started at $18 a week. Now she was earning $7 more. And on that little money her mother had to be supported also. So you can readily see that there wasn't much money left over for fine dresses and a Rolls-Royce town car.

Joan did not know what it meant to dig a man for gold. If she liked a man, she liked him—and that was enough for her. Strange gal. If she had been on the stage, they would have expelled her from the union . . .

John came to work for the publishing concern about a year before our story opens. He was just as strange a man as Joan was a woman. But in a totally reverse direction.

He was a melancholy chap, given to a great deal of brooding. He had an inferiority complex that should have been exhibited in a museum. He, too, had a family to support—and half of his $35 went in that direction every week.

John felt that he was a flat failure. He could see nothing in the future that would be better than the past. He would sit for hours in his room and gaze at the walls. Sometimes he would drink. When he did, he did it right. He would drink himself into oblivion and fall across his bed in a dead stupor.

Funny, then, that two such people as Joan and John should fall in love. The cards were stacked against them long before the game began . . .

John knew nothing of Joan's promiscuity. He knew only that he loved her devotedly and wanted to be with her as much as possible. The gossip and whispering around the office never reached his ears. Only once did that happen, and the man who brought the word to John was almost killed by him. So the boys and girls held their tongues when John was around.

Three nights a week John went out with Joan. They went for a stroll or they went to a picture. They would hold hands. And then, just before he left her, he would kiss her tenderly.

This may be the reason why Joan fell in love with him. Never once did he attempt to paw her. Never once was he suggestive. Never once did he treat her with anything but the utmost respect. It was a new experience for Joan—and she liked it.

John wanted to marry Joan, but the money problem was too big a burden at the moment. Joan would have been more than content to be John's wife without benefit of clergy—but she dared not suggest such a thing.

She knew John's moods. And she was afraid she might lose him entirely . . .

Into the office of the publishing house came a boy from Broadway. Formerly connected with a theatrical trade journal, he had turned playwright and had thrown up his job. Two of his plays had been accepted—but the first wasn't going into production for at least three months. Accordingly, the playwright was pressed for cash.

The second day on the job, the playwright met Joan. He looked her over with a practiced eye and decided that she was a pretty good bet for him. The following morning, he took her arm.

"I like you, baby," he chirped. "You and I are going to be great pals. Wonderful eyes you have. So dreamy, and all that. Suppose you and I hop a train for New York tonight and see a good musical? It's only half an hour's ride. What do you say, honey?"

Joan had a date with John that night. They were to go to a movie. They were going to sit and hold hands in the dimly lit theatre. They were going to have romance. What more could a girl want?

Plenty, evidently. Joan broke the date with John and went to New York with the playwright . . .

Three times the playwright took Joan out. Then he grew tired. The girl, it seemed to him, was a terrific dud. Didn't wear nice clothes either. Not quite in his class.

He passed her with a cool hello one afternoon. And she stopped him.

"I'm sorry you don't like me any more, Fred," she murmured. "you don't have to talk to me if you don't care to. But I have one favor to ask of you."

He patted her on the shoulder.

"Surest thing you know, girlie," he cried. "Anything little Freddie can do for his lady friends is always a pleasure. What's on your mind?"

"Some afternoon," she said, "after you've left here, you're going to throw a party. After your first play is produced, I mean. I never met any stage people outside of yourself. And I do so want to meet them.

"I want you to promise that you'll invite me to one of those parties. It will be the biggest thrill I ever had. Will you do it?"

The playwright grinned.

"I promise, honey," he asserted. "The very first whoopee I throw, you'll be among those present. I won't forget. So long." . . .

John, of course, knew nothing of what had transpired between the girl he loved and the playwright. He was deeply in love, you see. And he saw and suspected nothing. Have you ever been in love?

The playwright left the publishing house. Joan was waiting for his call. The months went by. No call arrived.

One Saturday, just before noon, the playwright phoned her. She was so excited that she could barely hold the phone. At last!

"Look, baby," said the playwright. "I made you a promise some time ago and I'd like to keep it now. After the matinee today a couple of people will drop around. Stage people, most of them. Want to come?"

Did she want to come? What a question!

"I'd love to," she responded eagerly. "What's the address and what time shall I get there?"

"Come to West 56th St.," said the playwright. "Get here a little after five. We'll have cocktails and things."

Joan leaped from her typewriter and hurriedly closed her desk. On the way from the office she met John.

"O, John!" she exclaimed happily, "I'm so excited! Remember Fred G., the playwright who used to work here? Well, he just called and invited me to his house this afternoon. There are going to be stage people there. Maybe stars!

"John, isn't it wonderful?"

John nodded. He took her hand in his.

"I hope you have a good time, dear," he said quietly. "And I know you will. But I don't like the idea of you running around the city all alone. Do you want me to come in and call for you?"

Joan smiled to herself. What a sweet guy this was!

"No, John. It won't be necessary. I'll be perfectly all right. Tell you what we'll do. I'll come home right after the party and you call for me. I should be home by 8:30. Let's go to a picture. Okay? Fine. See you later, dear."

Joan rushed home and examined her dresses. She shook her head. None of them, she felt, was fit to wear on such a glorious occasion. She would have to buy a new one. It would be a terrific drain on her pocket book. But, after all, she wanted to look her best.

Going to the small store a few blocks from her home, she began to look at dresses. Cheap ones, of course. There was a semi-evening gown for as low as $12.50. Even that was more than she could afford. There was another one for $15. It looked well on her, she thought.

With a sigh, she drew forth $15. And she left the store with the dress . . .

* * *

That evening, promptly at five o'clock, Joan was at the playwright's apartment. His first words to her made her heart sink.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Where did you get that terrible dress?"

She couldn't find the right words.

"I-I-," she stammered. "It's-it's just an old thing I had to put on in a hurry. I didn't have much time."

People began to arrive. Lee Tracy, star of "Broadway" and "the Front Page." Evangeline Raleigh, then beautifying a Shubert production. Con Conrad, the popular composer. Columnists. Actors. Beautiful girls. The people that Joan had always wanted to meet.

Strangely enough, Joan was sitting by herself. She was on the verge of tears. She knew now that her dress was pitifully bad and that she was totally out of place. Each girl that entered the room made the pain more acute. Each fur coat and beautiful gown made her want to crawl further and further into her chair.

Some of the cracks she couldn't help overhearing.

"Who's the hayseed in the corner? Looks like something the cat dragged in."

"Get a load of that dame over there. If she isn't a scream!"

"Pipe the dress on that gal. Wow!"

Finally she could stand it no longer. Sobbing hysterically, she ran out of the apartment and rushed down the street.

Her party was over . . .

That night, at 8:30, John was at her home. He had been drinking.

"Sorry, dear," he muttered. "Jus' had a few drinks 'cause I felt blue. You away at that big party, an' everything."

Then, for the first time, he saw the tears. He wanted to know what the trouble was. She wouldn't tell him. He demanded to know.

"If anybody has hurt you," he shouted, "I'll kill him. So help my God, I'll kill him! Who was it? Tell me now. Who was it?"

The girl looked up.

"Nobody has hurt me, John, dear," she said. "It's just that I, too, feel blue. Let's have a drink. Let's have two drinks. Let's have five drinks.

"Then maybe I'll tell you."

John took the flask from his pocket. They drank—and they drank again. Then the girl spoke.

"I'll tell you why I'm blue, John. It was that party this afternoon. I hated it. I only wish I never had gone.

"Those girls, John, they were so beautiful. And they wore beautiful things. I spent more than half my salary for a new dress, but they all laughed at it. I must have looked very bad, John. Very bad.

"That's why I'm crying, John. Because I haven't the money to have decent things like other girls have. Because we're both poor. And because we always will be poor."

John arose. He tilted the flask to his lips and drained it. Then he walked to her and kissed her gently on the forehead.

"I love you, dear," he murmured. "Excuse me for a moment."

A moment later there was a thud on the bathroom floor. Joan screamed and ran to the door. It was locked. She summoned aid. When help arrived, it was too late. The boy was dead.

He had killed himself with carbolic acid . . .

* * *

There, then, is your story. A man had destroyed himself because of his love for a woman. And he died without knowing that this woman was bad in the eyes of the world. He put himself in a grave because he felt that he would never be able to give her the things in life that a pure sweet girl should have.

What's that you say, boys? Your girl is different, Tom? And yours, Harry? And yours, Joe? And yours, Fred? Well, don't be a pack of damned fools. Of course your girls are different. Joan was one girl in one hundred million. The story couldn't really happen.

Drink up, boys . . .

XXX.

A FAVORITE SON

THERE were three sons in the family. Milton, Frank and Joe. Born in a small Ohio town, their father had died when Milton, the eldest, was but nine years of age. It was up to their mother to support them. And this she did with all the vigor at her command.

The four of them lived in their tiny home. Throughout the day the mother stood behind the counter at the neighborhood store. When her work was finished, she rushed to her home so that she might put in an hour or two on the small garden that gave them their vegetables.

As Milton grew, he helped her. Then Frank, two years younger than Milton, grew to help him. And finally Joe, three years younger than Frank, grew strong enough to grasp a spade and do what little he could to bring more food to the table.

The mother loved her sons—but most of all she adored her baby, Joe. To her he was the very breath of life. She would coddle him and fuss over him.

"Mamma loves her Joey," she would say softly. "Joey's never going to leave his mamma, is he? 'Cause mamma loves him best of all."

And the boy would huddle close in his mother's arms . . .

* * *

Some fifteen years later, it came time for parting. Milton, the eldest, had long since gone to New York. He had sent home glowing reports of the town where a man could make a fine living if he behaved himself well. Proof of his words came with the $10 notes that fell from his letter home each and every week.

Frank was determined to go. He told his mother so. She agreed. But when Joe said he was going along, his mother cried.

"You'll be the only one left, Joey," she said. "If you don't stay, I'll be all alone. Please stay with me, Joey. Please."

The youth shook his head.

"No use, ma. There's no chance in this cheese town. I want to go to New York too. That's the only place for a feller like me."

The mother begged and cajoled and pleaded. But the boy's mind was made up. In the end he triumphed—just as he always had. Frank had saved enough for his railroad fare. Joe had no money. So it was his mother who gave it to him.

They left together the next evening. The mother took them to the station and bit her lip as she kissed her Joey good-bye again and again.

And she stood looking down the track long after the train had vanished in the distance . . .

Ten years flew by. Milton and Frank were married and were earning respectable wages. But Joe had become a first class bum.

The name he had been given was not good enough for him. He entertained notions of being a songwriter and putting Irving Berlin and Walter Donaldson out of work. He gave himself a tony tag—and mingled with the Broadway boys.

He would not recognize his brothers. He failed to write home after the first year. The brothers, knowing his place in their mother's affections, wrote for him. And they chipped in to send his share of the weekly money. They could not bear to tell her the truth. It would break her heart. For she loved her Joey.

So time wore on. Joe became a pool room addict and a race track tout—but he still gave his occupation as that of a songwriter. He was hitting the bottle heavily now. Much too heavily.

Came a day when the brothers learned their mother was dying. They would have to rush to her. Milton sought out Joe—and found him in a speakeasy on 46th street.

He looked at his youngest brother.

"Joe," he said simply, "you don't have to be decent to me. I ask nothing. But mamma is dying. Come out at once with Frank and myself. We'll pay all expenses. Let her die happy, Joe. She loves you."

Joe grinned drunkenly.

"You can go to hell," he muttered. "And her too."

Milton rushed from the speakeasy, his knuckles sorely bruised. He had left his brother lying in a pool of blood . . .

* * *

The following night Milton and Frank were kneeling by their mother's side in the little house in Ohio. The village doctor hovered in the rear. The mother opened her eyes.

"Frank," she murmured weakly. "And Milton. But where's my Joey?"

Milton dropped his bruised knuckles from the side of the bed.

"Joe couldn't come, mamma," he responded. "He—he was very busy on a big busines deal."

The mother smiled faintly.

"A big business deal!" she breathed faintly. "My Joey on a big business deal. I—always—knew—he'd—make—good. My—Joey."

And she died. Happily . . .

XXXI.

A GREAT NAME

HIS name was Hans Stengel. A strange chap, he was; as strange a bird as ever tried to feather a nest in the Broadway alley. Perhaps he had no right in that district. But that's not for me to say.

Stengel was essentially the German. Tall, almost gaunt, he carried himself with military dignity. His hair was clipped right to the skull. His eyes were sharp and clear. He spoke in loud tones, was egotistical to a fault—and gave a damn for nobody.

Beyond a nod here and a word of greeting there, I never got to know Hans Stengel. I saw him frequently on opening nights—but that was all. . . . .

* * *

Stengel, they tell me, was born in America. But, at the age of two, he was taken to Germany, where he was educated. During the early part of the world war, Stengel served in the German army until he was wounded. Then, in 1915, he came back to America.

When this country entered the war Stengel was interned in New Jersey. That hurt. When they finally turned him loose, he was a bitter man.

The years passed. Stengel, who had built up a reputation as a great caricaturist in Germany, devoted himself to the same work in New York. He succeeded. Then he turned to dramatic criticism. And, until the beginning of 1928, he held that position on the Evening Journal.

There could be no question of Hans Stengel's success. But it did not change him. He remained a bitter, moody, sarcastic man . . .

Some time around December, 1927, I had my first opportunity to know Hans Stengel at close range. Beautifully drunk, he staggered into a tony speakeasy on West 48th St., and sat himself at the table next to mine. And there, without a word of warning, he began to speak harshly of the world in general.

There were five men at that table—all sober. Those men were all Broadway characters—and, to a Broadway character, there is no better sport in the world than taunting a drunken man who is willing to argue. They did not know that Hans Stengel was a serious man with serious thoughts.

And so they laughed at him. For a time, he did not understand that they were playing with him. He offered his thoughts on life and love and laughter. They argued with him, these wise men of Broadway—and they snickered in his face.

Finally, they grew tired of merely that. So they placed lighted matches in his shoes and threw scalding hot water against the seat of his chair. Hans Stengel saw that he was not wanted. He pushed back his chair, threw it to the floor, and rushed into the hall. And his only company was the hilarious laughter that floated after him.

I felt sorry for the man. After all, he was a genius in his way—and far above the cheapness of Broadway. So I went to him in the hall. And I tried to comfort him. Angrily, almost roughly, he pushed me away.

"They are swine!" he cried. "Cattle! I'll teach them to respect my name before I die. Everybody in the world will know me. Fools!" . . .

A few months after, Hans Stengel threw a party in his Village home. At the stroke of midnight he lit his pipe.

Then he walked to the fireplace, switched off the electric lights and lit two long candles that stood above the fireplace. His guests applauded the action. And Stengel smiled.

"So," he cried, "you, too, like darkness. Everybody likes darkness—once in a while!" And he disappeared in the bathroom.

An hour later they found him. His belt was around his neck and he was hanging in mid-air. His pipe, three-quarters smoked, hung grotesquely from his mouth. As the flickering light of the fireside played on his body, he looked for all the world like one of his own caricatures.

Except, perhaps, the fact that this was one caricature of Hans Stengel's that had no life to it . . . .

* * *

I sat in the office the following afternoon, pondering on Stengel's suicide. He had told me that every one would know him before he died. Perhaps every one did. I wondered.

A young reporter—the youngest on the staff—passed my desk. And he asked me what I was thinking of.

"Hans Stengel is dead," I responded vaguely, "a suicide. Did you hear about it?"

The young reporter wrinkled his brow.

"Stengel?" he repeated curiously. "Stengel?" And then suddenly the light dawned.

"O, yes!" he cried. "I remember him. Stengel dead, eh? Say, he was a great ballplayer in his day, wasn't he?" . . .

XXXII.

A VENTURE INTO JOURNALISM

TOM is a confidence man. One of the best, I guess, in the entire country. Tom can sell you the Brooklyn Bridge, have you complain to the police—and then collect a toll from you on each machine that drives across it.

When I first heard from Tom he was a prisoner in a northwestern jail. He had read one of my articles and he claimed that it touched his heart. At any rate, he wrote me a letter that was a masterpiece.

Now, I get many letters from convicts. Exactly why this should be I do not know. But in they come just the same. Maybe they feel that, from the way I earn a living, I should be out there with them.

A great many of these letters mean nothing. Some of them merely ask for assistance and let it go at that. Others tell the stories of their lives. And a few of them—which I delight in receiving—relate humorous episodes of prison life.

At any rate, Tom's was the best prison letter that ever came to my desk. It was beautifully handled and expertly written. I read it several times and then sent him an answer, urging him to write again.

He did. His second letter was just as good as his first. I was astounded. I figured that I had discovered another gent who should have been writing for the American Mercury. I again responded to his epistle by asking if there wasn't something I could do for him.

His response was practically immediate. All he wanted, he insisted, was a year's subscription to The New York Daily News—daily and Sunday. The cost, if I recall correctly, was something like $12.50 for such an order. Nevertheless, I plunked down the required amount and ordered Tom his papers for one year.

About a week later, my secretary handed me the papers from the town in which Tom's prison was located. And what was the big news? After all my worry about a year's subscription, Tom had escaped from jail! . . .

* * *

Some three weeks following, a chap with very brilliant black eyes tapped me on the shoulder.

"Mr. Hellinger?" he inquired.

I nodded. How he ever got past the various gentlemen at the door I will never know.

He looked around.

"I'm Tom," he whispered. And he drew up a chair and sat down.

We shook hands.

"How did you get out?", I inquired.

"I was released," he grinned. "They decided that I had done enough penance for my various crimes. The penance is mightier than the sword."

I liked the guy immediately. A bum pun like that would make me like anybody. If he wanted me to feel that he had been released, that was up to him. I am not yet a member of the police department.

"What are you going to do with yourself?" I asked him after a while.

"I've been cooped up for a long time," he aswered. "I'm going to play for a little while."

And playing was exactly what he did . . .

I used to meet him in the various cafes. He always had half a bun on. And he was never without a couple of blonde cuties to keep him company.

He was spending a lot of money. Where it was coming from I had no idea. That was his business. Mine is knowing guys like him.

All good things, it seems, must come to an end. He dropped into the office one afternoon and told me about it.

"Mark," he said, "they've put the finger on me. I've got to get out of town. And what's just as bad—if not worse—I've got to go to work. I'm so near busted that it's not even funny. I'm clearing out of town. You'll hear from me."

We shook hands once more. He left . . .

* * *

Tom is in jail again. They caught him while I was out west in Hollywood. They must have nabbed him when he least expected it, for he was engaged in earning a very respectable living in a very respectable manner.

Maybe, when I tell you what he was doing, you'll grow to like him as much as I did. Tom, the escaped convict, was doing newspaper work in Baltimore. And in what particular line, do you suppose?

He was covering police headquarters! . . .

BOOK THREE
NIGHT

XXXIII.

NEW YEAR'S EVE ON BROADWAY

NEW YEAR'S EVE on Broadway. 1931. The poet's dream. The bootlegger's heaven. The hat check girl's julep of joy. Lights. Love. Laughter. Tickets. Taxis. Tears. Bad Booze putting hics into hicks and bills into tills. Sadness. Gladness. Madness. New Year's Eve on Broadway.

I stood in front of the Astor Hotel and watched the crowds go this way and that, that way and this. The way of the whirled, you know. Everybody so happy. Or seeming so happy, which is the next best thing. Pushing. Milling. Grinning.

See that frail flivver shoot past that powerful Packard. Two people in the Packard. Nine in the Ford. Men selling trick mustaches. And ticklers. And balloons that blow up into chickens. It's nearing midnight. Those horns. And claxons. And sirens. Such a din!

Take a deep breath of that cold, fresh air. Boy, it's great to be alive. On New Year's Eve. . .

* * *

"Spare a quarter, mister?"

Funny question to pop out of the air at that moment. Seemed almost out of place. Here was someone who was begging for money when all the others were spending money to beg for happiness.

I turned toward the voice. The man didn't look like the ordinary beggar. Small cap. Blue suit that was by no means a total wreck. A small overcoat wrapped tightly about him.

He might have been fifty years of age. Or fifty-five. Or sixty, for that matter.

"I'm not a real beggar, mister," he was saying. "Just trying to get enough to tide me over for a day or two. These days are not the same for an Old Timer like me. Broadway's different from what it used to be."

He was telling me, was he? Oh, well. I handed him a dollar on the chance that he'd talk. The dollar was well invested. He talked. And he said something.

"You know," he mused, "New Year's Eve always sets me thinking. Same as it does most folks, I guess. Makes me feel sorta sad inside. Not 'cause I'm broke for the time being. Not at all. I feel funny 'cause life ain't what it used to be.

"My mind runs back over the years. It seems like yesterday they were celebrating the start of a new century. New Year's Eve in 1900! Say, young feller, those were days on Broadway that were real days!

"Right across the street was Rector's! Ah, that was a place. No stupid dancing in those days. Just music and wine and the girl. But you remember Rector's, don't you? Sure. -Everybody remembers Rector's.

"Look over there at that Times Building. Yes, it's beautiful in a way. But not as beautiful as the old Pabst restaurant that stood there in 1900. Say, they're all coming back to me—everyone of those old landmarks.

"The old St. Cloud Hotel where the Knickerbocker Building stands now. The celebrated Metropole Hotel is now an idiotic jewelry store. The Rossmore Hotel is a haberdashery. And so on down the line. All gone. And what for?

"Martin's chop house—open morning, noon and night. Charley Schloss's cafe. The Aulic Hotel. Engel's chop house. And down further, at 33rd street, was Trainor's

Hotel. Steaks—sirloin, I mean—for fifty cents, and a huge lettuce and tomato salad for fifteen cents. Say, those were happy times!

"Hammerstein's Victoria Theatre stood right there on the corner of 42nd St. Famous people played there. Real artists and celebrities of the day. And now what have you got? Movies! Brain food for fools. Bah!

"And the women. Ah, they were real then. And the styles were beautiful. High necks and long trains. Pompadours. None of your painted flappers with dangling cigarettes. Just women as God intended 'em to be.

"The men have changed too. And for worse. If a man took two small drinks of whiskey in 1900, he was drinking a lot and kept it quiet. Any man who carried a flask was a cheap skate. Today the man who doesn't carry a flask is the cheap skate—and the more he drinks, the more he brags about it. It's all wrong.

"Look at those damned taxis rushing around like a pack of demons. In the good old days, you had your hansom cab or your victoria. Those were vehicles for ladies and gentlemen. You went across 42nd St. in a horse car, nobody ever dreamed of that nuisance they called the subway and—"

The Old Timer interrupted his narrative abruptly. He looked at me for a moment and then broke into a broad grin.

"Say, I'm telling you about 1900—and here we are standing in front of the Astor Hotel this very minute. I remember the New Year's Eve of that year 'cause I was married two weeks later. And if that ain't enough to make a man remember things, I don't know what is.

"Yes, sir. It seems to me I was standing right close to this spot that night talking to some people who lived in the Cumberland flats, which occupied this block before they built the Astor. I'd had a bit too much wine, I guess, 'cause I can remember an old man coming down the steps and shaking his cane at me for something I did.

"I have to laugh when I think what I told him. 'Say,' I yelled, 'why don't you go to bed? This is New Year's Eve—a night for the young fellows."

"Well, sir—"

Came the sudden shriek of a motor horn and the grinding of brakes. The Old Timer, carried away by his enthusiasm, had stepped off the curb. A battered machine, carrying some ten young people, had barely missed hitting him. Only a sharp turn of the wheel had saved the Old Timer from losing his memories forever.

A young girl sat in the rear of that machine. Pretty as a picture, she was sprawled over two of the boys while her legs dangled contentedly over the right rear fender. And as the Old Timer slipped and almost fell, the girl howled with laughter.

"Hey, pop," she screamed, "you wanna watch your step. You got one foot in the grave and you ain't wise to yourself.

"Get hep, baby. This ain't no night for grandpas to be chasin' around." . . .

* * *

The crowd laughed. Crowds always do. Such a funny girl. Great kid really. Called the turn all right. "No night for grandpas." Ha, ha. Ho, ho.

A whistle. A blinking light. Traffic. More noise. And when I looked around the Old Timer had vanished. His story was finished. Out for another dollar, no doubt.

Oh, well. Just another episode. Lights. Love. Laughter. See them go! Take another breath of that cold, fresh air. 1931. It's great to be alive. On New Year's Eve . . .

XXXIV.

PRESENT

FOR your information, there's a celebrated actor in New York who has supported his brother-in-law for many years. As a matter of fact, when the actor married, his wife's brother went into the agreement—even though the actor didn't realize it at the time. So few of us do, you know.

The years flew by and still the actor continued to shell out to his non-working relative. One day, recently, he grew tired of it all, and he handed out a terrific squawk. He told the brother-in-law he should be ashamed of himself, and so forth and so on. The relative nodded, hung his head and promised to get himself a job on the morrow.

The following day, the brother-in-law strolled into the actor's home bright and early. It was no more than three in the afternoon. His eyes were bright and his throat was dry.

"George," he told the actor sincerely, "I'm through with all this bumming around. I'm going out and sell jewelry. From now on I'm going to hit the straight and narrow."

"Only one more favor I want to ask of you. They're giving me a sample case full of jewelry, and they want somebody to put up a cash bond on it. I told them that you would. Will you? Thanks very much."

Another day went by and the brother-in-law again appeared at the actor's house. This time he had the precious sample case with him. He shook hands with the actor, thanked him from the bottom of his heart and drew forth a watch from his pocket.

"George," he cried, "you've been mighty sweet to me through all these years. I want to make you a little present of this watch. It's not much, but it's all I can afford right now. Please take it."

The actor took the present and wished his brother-in-law much luck in his new endeavor. The relative tucked his sample case under his arm and departed.

Soon there was much excitement in the actor's family. Instead of attending to business, the relative had gone off on a bat. As a result, the jewelry in his sample case was in hock shops from the Bowery to the Bronx.

This was serious business. The actor took the only way out. He went from hock shop to hock shop and redeemed the various articles. When he had them all collected, he called his relative and handed him the sample case once again.

"Here you are," he said severely, "this is your last chance. If you go on a stew again, I'm through with you forever. And that goes."

The relative looked into the sample case.

"Thanks, George," he responded. "Is everything here?"

"Yes," said the actor shortly, "everything's there."

"Well," murmured the relative apologetically, "would you mind giving me back that watch I gave you as a present? That belongs in here too!" . . . .

XXXV.

IF

I WAS on the way to Boston for a week-end. I sat in the club car, where men are talkative and women seldom visit. Most of the men were talking over the Army-Notre Dame game that they had witnessed that afternoon.

"Tell you something about that Army team today," observed one fellow. "They were extremely unlucky. Lots of folks are going to blame Chris Cagle for tossing a pass that lost the game for the Army.

"Yet it wasn't his fault. He was simply unlucky. If his own man had caught the pass and had scored a touchdown for Army, Cagle would have been a national hero. But the break went against him—and there you are."

Powerful word—if. Powerful word—luck. Somehow or other, they seem to go hand in hand. If the Kaiser hadn't—

"Funny," murmured the man seated next to me, "how these chaps are discussing football and settling everything among themselves. That guy on the end made the astounding discovery that it's the breaks that count in football. What he failed to realize is that everything in life is paid off in 'if' money."

I turned to my neighbor in astonishment. It was as if he had been reading my mind.

"You know," he mused, "the best friend I ever had is out of his mind today. He's insane—and there's where your 'if' comes in. If he hadn't gone out of his way to be decent to a fellow man, he'd be perfectly normal right now. Would you care to hear the story?"

It was like offering a leaf of lettuce to a rabbit. I nodded. And here is the story he told. . . .

John Williams was a prosperous insurance broker in New York City. Although he was forty years of age, he had never married. There were but two souls he loved in all this world. One was his mother, who was now aging rapidly. The other was his kid brother.

He adored that kid. The boy was some twelve years younger than he and was a totally different type of character. Maybe that's why he loved him. The boy had no thought of business. He was an inveterate gambler and the women fascinated him. He was strictly a one woman man. One woman a day.

Some four years before this story opens, the kid disappeared. He didn't say how and he didn't say why and he didn't say when. He merely left home one morning and he failed to return. The days turned into months and the months turned into years—and the boy never appeared again.

Tom—that was the kid's name—didn't so much as drop his family a postal card. At first John had invented a white lie. The kid, he told his mother, had gone to South America on a business venture. But as the months rolled by and no word came, he couldn't continue to lie.

He confessed to his mother that he knew nothing of the boy's whereabouts. The mother nodded—sadly. She had known all the time that her elder son was merely concocting a story. Mothers always do seem to know these things somehow.

So here was John Williams four years later. Wealthy. Able to support his mother in fine style. Respected by every one he knew. But lonesome just the same.

Into his office one morning came a man with a brief case. He had been able to pass two secretaries and an office boy by explaining that his business was extremely personal. When he finally reached John Williams' desk he opened his brief case and attempted to sell him some advertising folders to be used in his insurance business.

Williams grew peeved.

"What's the big idea?" he cried. "I'm a busy man. Why do you come in here and annoy me when you could have talked to one of my secretaries about that stuff?"

The salesman picked up his folders with a gesture of despair.

"It's no use, boss," he muttered, "I get the same story wherever I go. I can't stay straight any longer. If I do I'll starve to death."

This interested John Williams. He asked the man why he had said such a thing.

"Well," continued the salesman, "it's true. I was down in a prison camp in Louisiana for six years. When I got out I swore I'd never go back, even if I had to kill myself to stay away.

"There isn't much that an ex-convict can do in New York, boss. I've tried a lot of things, but I never get very far. I took this salesman's job last Monday. This is Friday and I haven't placed an order yet. It's no use, I guess."

The man was interesting. John Williams continued to speak to him. For ten minutes they talked on.

The ex-convict suddenly raised his head and pointed to a picture that was hanging on the wall.

"Say," he cried, "who is that guy?"

Williams turned around.

"Which one?" he queried. "O, that one. That's my brother, Tom. My younger brother."

"You sure?" inquired the ex-convict.

"Of course I'm sure," retorted Williams. "He's my own brother."

The visitor shook his head.

"Well," he asserted, "I must be mistaken. But he certainly is a dead ringer for him."

"For whom?" pressed the insurance man.

Silence for a moment.

"Hope you don't get sore," said the ex-convict slowly. "but your brother's picture up there is an absolute ringer for Tommy Jordan who was down in that Louisiana jail with me. Funny how two guys can look alike."

"Y-yes," stammered John. "certainly is strange. What—what kind of a man is this—this Tommy Jordan?"

"O," returned the visitor casually, "he's about twenty-eight or thirty, I'd say. Heluva swell feller, too. Never says anything where he comes from or anything like that. Got mixed up in a shooting after a card game and he got nabbed.

"They gave him eight years, I think. He's still got about six to do. I don't envy him."

Card game. His brother loved to gamble. It must be true——

"Well," he heard himself saying, "I'm glad it's not my brother. I only saw him a—a couple of hours ago. By the way, what prison camp did you say that was?"

The ex-convict told him. Williams nodded and extended his hand. He had a grip on himself now.

"Glad you came in," he murmured affably. "Enjoyed our little talk. Sorry I made you feel uncomfortable in the beginning. And by the way, I've decided to take some of those advertising folders you're selling. See my secretary on the way out and she'll give you a nice order. So long."

The salesman shook hands and walked out. If he suspected anything you'd never know it by looking at him. . .

* * *

Later in the day, John Williams made a great mistake. When he reached home, his mother noticed that he had something on his mind. She pressed him for information—and he told her.

His mother was strangely quiet. She said nothing for some time. Then she asked where the prison was.

John gave her the name. Then—

"That's in Louisiana, mamma," he went on, "not far from New Orleans. I'm going to straighten out my affairs tomorrow and go down there the following day. Please don't think too harshly of Tommy, mamma. Maybe it wasn't his fault."

The next morning after John left the house, his mother packed a grip. Soon after, she was on her way. On the way to her boy who needed her. . . .

She reached the prison. As soon as her grip was deposited in a hotel, she hastened there. And she asked for a man named Williams. Reason, they wanted to know? Her own boy!

John had not told his mother that Tom was under the name of Jordan. She had no way of knowing. They brought out a Williams, a hardened gorilla of forty-eight. Not her boy. They brought out the only other Williams prisoner. He was colored. A grim jest.

She went home to her hotel. She was tired out, hurt, lonesome. She felt weak. She retired for a short nap. Far from being a short nap, it proved to be a long sleep. Her heart failed her. A few minutes later, she was dead. . . .

John Williams was on his way to New Orleans when news of his mother's death reached him. What his feelings were need not be written here. One thing, however, must be told.

He began to hate his brother. He hated him with an intensity that cannot be described. It was he who had killed their mother. It was he who had brought ruin to all their lives. Everything was his fault.

When he reached the prison, the way was open for him. He knew the magic password—Tommy Jordan. He asked for the man. And his brother was brought.

Tom looked at him for a moment. Then he stepped forward, his hand outstretched.

"John," he cried eagerly. "Gee, I'm glad to see you! Don't know how you found me. Got mixed up in a jam and tried to keep it quiet as possible. But I'm awful glad to see you."

"Yes?" replied John.

Tom smiled.

"Aw, come on, John," he pleaded, "be regular, will you. It wasn't my fault. Honest it wasn't. I'll tell you the whole story and you'll understand.

"But first tell me this. How's mamma?"

John Williams twisted his face into a mask.

"Mamma?" he returned. "You ask about mamma? You dare? Well, if you must know, I'll tell you. She's dead. She's lying in a hotel not far from here and I must bring the body back.

"She's dead, you rat," he screamed, " and it was you who killed her! She loved you—and she came all the way here to see you. Now she's dead. And I only wish to God that He'd strike you dead, too!"

They led him away, still screaming. . . .

The next morning John Williams was on his way back to New York. He was bringing his mother's body back with him—but he was a different man from the day before. He had had time to think. And he was sorry.

After all, it wasn't really the kid's fault. He didn't know about mother. He had done nothing intentionally. He had always been the kid that John had loved. Maybe the sentence hadn't been really his fault either. Yes, he realized that he had been too hasty.

Well, he'd make it up. He couldn't turn back now, but he'd wire the kid. He was sorry. Really sorry.

At the next stop, he left the train and walked to the telegraph operator in the station. On his way there, he stopped to buy a paper. Idly, he glanced at the front page. A headline caught his eye.

"Convict A Suicide In Cell," it read. "Tommy Jordan, Mystery Prisoner, Hangs Self With Belt. Leaves No Note."

* * *

"So poor John Williams," our friend in the club car went on, "is now in an insane asylum. Keeps talking about his brother, his mother, belts and things. He'll die there.

"And that's how the 'if' comes in. If that ex-convict hadn't reached his office, Williams would be happy today. If Williams hadn't been so decent to that ex-convict, there would be no tragedy to relate. Strange, isn't it?"

I nodded. We both had another drink. We both needed it. Because it's a funny world. . . . .

XXXVI.

GOOD ADVICE

THE boy was in the chorus. His name was Joe. Just a good-looking kid and yearning for success on the stage. Always broke and always happy, which is an ideal combination. Took that job in the chorus because it was the only way he could break into the business.

In the same show was an older man. His name was Paul. Paul was a character actor — probably some forty-three years of age. He was an excellent movie type, but it seemed somehow that he never could quite connect in that field. He was in this musical show because it offered him more than any other stage job around the town.

Paul met Joe during rehearsals and took a liking to the kid. He liked him because of his youth, his personality and his ambitions. Joe, on the other hand, looked up to Paul like a stage-struck girlie looks up to Gloria Swanson. As far as Joe was concerned, Paul was just about the wisest man in the world.

The show came to town. It was a hit . . .

* * *

A month or so passed. Joe, under Paul's advice and guidance, was doing well. He had been taken out of the chorus and given a bit with a few lines. His salary was raised accordingly. And then at supper one night the older man preached to the boy as a father might to a son.

"Joe," he stated, "take a tip from an oldtimer and save your money. No matter how little it is, put something away each week. In this business that is something that you must do. Save your money, Joe. Save your money.

"Look around you and see all the broken-down bums who are searching for jobs in the theatrical business. Take a lesson from them while you're still a young fellow, Joe. Put a little money away each week, Joe. Be wise."

Joe nodded. But he said nothing.

We draw the curtain over fourteen months. Joe has gone on the road with the show. Paul has not. They have not seen each other for some eight months. And they finally meet on the corner of 41st and Broadway at three in the afternoon.

Joe has just stepped out of the Bowery and East River bank. In his hand is a little black book. He sees Paul and throws his arms around him. They exchange greetings and whatnots. And, finally Joe flashes his little book triumphantly.

"Look, Paul," he cries happily, "I took your advice. I've been saving my money, a little at a time. And I've $1,000 now. Imagine that! $1,000! All mine!"

Paul smiles.

"I'm happy too, kid," he murmurs. "You've done a wise thing. You've saved your money and that means a great, great deal. I'm happy to have been able to give you that little lecture. What are you going to do with the money?"

The kid's eyes flash.

"I'm going," he says, "to the coast. I'm going to take a fling at the movies. They tell me I'm not bad looking. I've got $1,000 saved. Until that goes, the world is mine. Wish me luck, Paul."

Their hands meet in a firm clasp. And that is all . . .

* * *

Six months more rolled into the once-upon-a-time. We come now to a recent day. Paul is employed in a current musical. He had received but one letter from Joe. And that one was rather discouraging.

It was after the performance. Paul was talking to a friend, the while he was busily engaged in removing his makeup. A knock at the door. A telegram. Paul opened it and found that it came from Joe.

"Dear Paul," the wire read, "I've landed at last. Just signed a five year contract with Fox—$350 a week for the first year and so on until I get $1,500 a week the fifth year. I owe it all to your little sermon. My thanks to you from the bottom of a grateful heart.". . .

Paul read and re-read the telegram. Then he flipped it over to his friend.

"Just a boy that I taught to save a little dough," he said, as his friend read the wire. "Looks as though he made good in California. I'm happy for his sake."

The friend looked at Paul.

"Say, Paul," he cried, "you'd be a great type for the movies. How is it that you've never taken a little trip to California and tried the movie game?"

Paul sighed.

"I've often wanted to," he said, "but I guess it's not to be."

The friend was persistent.

"But why?" he insisted.

Paul flicked the last bit of makeup from his face.

"Because," he murmured, "I've never been able to save enough money to take me out there." . . .

XXXVII.

MARKED CARDS

SHE'S dead now. Has been for several years. She was a remarkable woman. Had it not been for her desire to gamble, she would have left much money. Just what good it would have done her to leave much money, I do not know. But that's the story they tell.

She was a booking agent. Some of the greatest stars in America paid her a commission every week in the year. Her average income was well over $750 a week. When she kicked off they found that she didn't have enough money to buy a watermelon in Georgia. A number of her acts chipped in for her burial. She was lucky at that.

Gambling put her in the tough spot. The fever ran high within her. The ponies, roulette, dice, baseball, fights—anything at all. She would bet you on anything from a football game to the number of hairs in Adolphe Menjou's mustache. But most of all she loved her poker.

Poker was her biggest thrill. She would play at any hour of the day or night. Showing her a deck of poker cards was like waving a herring in a Bronx express. Her agency business brought in the money and poker took it away. When it came to a choice of attending to work or engaging in a little poker game, the game always won the decision in a walk.

Thus, they tell of her a story that happened but six weeks before she died. It is absolutely true . . .

* * *

It was early summer in New York City. High in an office building in the vicinity of Times Square the woman agent sat in her office and complained to a friend.

"This is disgusting," she muttered. "Everybody out of town. All I ask tonight is a little poker game and a few highballs. And can I get them? I cannot. I'd go anywhere right now to play some poker. Anywhere."

Her female friend nodded half-heartedly.

"Yep," she agreed, "I wouldn't mind a little game myself. But where are we going to find one? Everything closed up. Everybody out of town. Well, guess there's no use talking about it. We're just out of luck."

They sat quietly for a few moments. Suddenly the agent jumped to her feet.

"Wait," she cried. "I heard of a game the other day on West 103d St. Kind of a closed corporation up there, I hear, but maybe I can pull a few wires. No wheels up there, they say. Just poker and dice.

"I'm going to try to get an entree up there. I just have to play a little poker tonight."

The next twenty minutes found the agent phoning all over the city. After much trouble the connection was finally arranged. Armed with a note of introduction, the two women hopped into a cab and were whirled rapidly in the direction of the very sub rosa gambling joint on 103d St.

"Gee, I'm tickled," asserted the agent. "Can't beat a poker game on a night like this. Glad I heard about this house. Lucky to get a connection, too. About the only place open in town right now, I guess." . . .

They were ushered into the gambling house. It was far from crowded. The owner, a mustached gent with a slimy smile, greeted the women and assured them that a game of stud poker would be arranged for them at once. As a matter of fact, he himself would be one of the players. Five minutes later they were playing.

The boss was the head man. The cards did everything for him but sit up and shake hands. His luck was uncanny. It was but a matter of an hour or so when both women were pretty well cleaned. They didn't have $100 left between them.

The friend suddenly pressed close to the ear of the agent.

"Listen," she whispered excitedly, "I've been watching that guy and he's crooked! We're playing with marked cards. I wouldn't be surprised if the're using phoney dice on the poor suckers in the next room, too. The whole joint is crooked, I tell you."

The agent who loved her poker above all else nodded vigorously.

"I know it," she breathed softly. "But for goodness sake don't make any sort of a scene or an outcry. If you do, we'll never be allowed into this game again!" . . .

XXXVIII.

HOLLYWOOD AT HOME

EVER attend a Hollywood party? I did. Lovely things they are. Yes indeed. Lovely to read about. And lovely to see in the movies. But in real life—wow! Listen:

"Good morning, Mr. Hellinger. Can you recognize my voice? No? How disappointing. I actually thought I made more of an impression on you. Ha, ha. Well, I shan't tease you any more. This is Mrs. Jerome Z. Jones, wife of Mr. Jerome Z. Jones, the director. My husband and I met you and your charming wife at the Moscowitz's the other night. Surely you remember us?"

"O, how do you do? Of course I remember you. How are you feeling?"

"Quite well, thank you. I'm giving a little party tonight at my home in Beverly Hills and I want you and your wife to attend. You will come, won't you?"

"Well, Er, that is—I mean . . . "

"That's fine. I'll expect you then, around 9. Good-by, Mr. Hellinger." . . . . .

9 P. M. . . . "O, how do you do, Mr. Hellinger. So glad to see you and Mrs. Hellinger. Let me take your things. You're a little bit early. Yes, ha, ha. When we say 9 o'clock, nobody ever arrives before 10. You'll get used to our Hollywood ways before long. Yes, indeed, ha. ha. Do come into the parlor. Please don't mind the way the place looks. We didn't expect you to come so early, ha ha. My husband is upstairs shaving. He always shaves at 9 o'clock at night. Funny man—but they say that all geniuses are that way.

Yes, ha ha. Do let me fix you a drink, Mr. Hellinger. What will you have? We have anything you might want, you know. What? Brandy? Is brandy the same as Scotch? It isn't? Well, I'm sorry, we haven't any brandy.

"Is there anything else? Rye? Is rye the same as Scotch? It isn't? Well, I'm sorry. We haven't any rye. Won't you try our Scotch? You will? That's fine. What will I put in it? Did you say White Rock? Well, ha ha. I'm sorry. We haven't any White Rock—but we have some very nice ginger ale. You will take ginger ale, won't you? That's fine. I'll be right back with your drinks. Do make yourselves comfortable, ha ha."

9:10 P. M. . . . "What do you think, Mr. Hellinger? We haven't any ginger ale either. Do you mind drinking it with plain water? No? Fine! Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll go upstairs and fix my hair. Just make yourselves at home, ha. ha." . . .

10 P. M. . . . The guests are arriving, some invited and some not. As each one enters, a great shout goes up . . . "O, there's Dick! Yoo, hoo, hello Dick. You're looking great. See you later. Say Fannie, doesn't Dick look terrible? I never liked him anyhow. He's too conceited. He's—why, hello Dick, old pal. I was just talking about you. I was saying that, of all the actors in Hollywood, I think you are the least affected. Don't thank me; you know it's true. Let's have a little drink." . . .

11 P. M. . . . The party is now in full swing. So this is the wild life of Hollywood! What a laugh! I've seen wilder parties in a turkish bath. Everybody is drinking hard to forget the boredom of the thing. The gathering is as friendly as the opposing sides in the world war. People stand around in little groups—and most folks walk from group to group panning the group they just left. Witticisms flow like

frozen molasses. The host is making love to a little movie player. He's having a hard time, though, because he's keeping one eye on a bottle of Scotch and the other eye on his wife. A song writer sits at the piano and plays his latest theme song. Everybody applauds wildly as they whisper to their neighbors, "I wonder where he stole that one from?"

A movie actor strolls over and inquires about "deah old New York." He asks about his pals—the Astors, the Vanderbilts and the Goulds. The poor sap doesn't know that I know he was a doorman at the Capitol theatre only four years ago. O, well . . .

12 P. M. . . . "Hello, ol' boy. Shay, d'ya mind it I dansh with your wife? You do! You gotta heluva nerve. You mush think I'm drunk, or sompin." . . . "Pardon me, Mr. Smellinger, you're a scenario writer, aren't you? No? O, a newspaperman. How stupid of me! I've read your articles time and time again. You're a financial expert, aren't you? How'sh Wall Street these days?" . . .

1 A. M. . . .Time for practically every one to be in bed. A few drunks lying around. The host has disappeared. I can't say goodby to him because I never did meet him. The hostess sees us looking around for our things. She reluctantly releases the hand of a young tenor and staggers over to us.

"Mush you go so shoon? Tch, tch, tch. Shorry you can't stay jus' a little while longer. Been a nice party, no?"

"Wonderful, Mrs. Jones. Very nice of you to invite us. We had a wonderful time."

"Shure. Everybody always has wonnerful timesh at my partiesh. Well, good night. An' don't take any wooden nickelsh. Ha ha. Good night."

"Good night." . . . .

XXXIX.

THE HOLLYWOOD WAY

ONCE upon a time a young author came to Hollywood. He was quite a famous young writer—and the concern for whom he came to write pictures, was paying him a very fancy salary. After sitting around for five weeks, the writer was finally called into an executive's office and told to write a story about a certain star.

Accordingly, the writer went to his home and locked himself in. He wanted this first picture to be a knockout and he worked like the very devil toward that end. After three weeks of writing, rewriting and re-rewriting, his story was finished.

He read it over several times and nodded his head in satisfaction. He had done a good job, he felt, a very good job. So he trotted around to the executive's office and turned in the script.

"It's a good story, I think," were his words of comment. "Read it over. I think you'll like it."

And he left. . . .

* * *

The executive took the story home with him that night. He read it, and even though he formerly sold clothing and didn't know an O. Henry story from a Shakespearean drama, he felt called upon to make some changes.

He left the script in the room and went to another man's house for a conference. His wife picked it up, read it and made some changes of her own accord. The next morning, before the executive left for his office, his ten-year-old daughter glanced through the script, grabbed a pen and rewrote a number of the speeches to suit herself.

When the executive reached his office, he called in his best continuity man and handed him the script.

"Here," he said, "is a story by F——, that young writer I brought out here. It was a pretty fair story, and the changes I've put in make it a great story. Write it into continuity form."

The continuity man went to his own office and read the photoplay.

"Humph," he muttered, "I can see right now that this thing will have to be changed a great deal more than it is. As long as it's going to be changed, I might as well make the changes myself.

"I think I'll do it while I'm writing the continuity."

When he had finished, the story bore only a slight resemblance to the original script. The executive was too busy to read the continuity.

So the chosen director was called in and the continuity turned over to him. . . .

* * *

The director read the continuity and got together with his star.

"The author of this story," said the director, "is a young fellow. I'm afraid he doesn't know any too much. If you don't mind, I think I'll try my best to make this a better story."

The star nodded agreeably. He was brainless, even for Hollywood.

"By all means," he asserted. "And when you're finished, give me a look at it. I think that I'll have an idea or two that we can put in there. I have a great knowledge of story values, you know."

About two weeks later the production got under way.

In six weeks the picture was finished. The writer was called in to see some of the rushes. He looked at several portions of the film and listened to the dialogue. In the middle of it he went over to the director.

"Pardon me, sir," he asked. "But aren't you showing me the wrong film? This isn't mine, is it?"

"Of course it is," was the director's answer. "Naturally there have been certain changes made—but they are all for the better. Sit down and let's watch the rest of those scenes."

The young writer sank into his seat and closed his eyes in despair. . . .

* * *

The picture went into the hands of the cutter. The cutter had heard that the author was a young fellow. He cut the picture. And how he cut! If ever a picture was handled brutally, this one was it.

Shortly after, there was to be a preview. The author was notified. He went around and invited several of his friends.

"Be at the theatre at eight o'clock sharp tonight," he said. "I want you to see this thing. But remember—nothing about the picture is mine. The only thing they have used that I turned in is my name."

That night, promptly at eight, the author was in his seat at the theatre. He was curious to see exactly how they had murdered the story.

"Well," he murmured to himself, "I have one consolation, anyhow. My name is on the film. Maybe I'll have better luck next time."

The picture was flashed on the screen. The young writer gave vent to one long howl and passed out. His name had been spelled wrong! . . . .

XL

DIFFERENT

ABOUT two years ago. I received a letter from a woman. It was the same type of letter that comes to me so often. The woman had a daughter, sixteen. Her husband was dead. The child was very pretty. Could I help to put her on the stage?

Now it so happens that I advise very few girls to go into the chorus. The life is too tough. And if they have any brains at all, they are never happy when they get there. If I had a kid of sixteen and needed her support, I'd rather see her in a cheap restaurant making soupee than in a chorus making whoopee.

So I answered that letter just as I answer so many others. I told the mother that, much as I would like to help her, I could not do so.

Some two days later, in the early part of the afternoon, a woman came in to see me. She was a little woman. About forty I should say. Gray hair. Very thin hands.

"Perhaps, Mr. Hellinger," she murmured, "I shouldn't have come. Your letter, which I have here, is enough to make me understand that you did not wish to assist me. But I'm really desperate. I know my little girl can help me—if she gets the chance.

"She's sitting outside now, Mr. Hellinger. All I want you to do is to look at her.

"Can't you do that for me? After all, it isn't so very much, is it?"

What could I do? I told the mother to bring her daughter in.

That mother brought before me one of the sweetest looking girls I have ever seen. She was a natural blonde. She used no make-up.

But it was her eyes that attracted me the most. They were blue—and terribly shy. You sensed that they were looking at you. But when you turned your own eyes to meet them, they swerved suddenly—and dropped.

The mother led her daughter aside and then returned to me.

"You see, Mr. Hellinger? She is beautiful. Not because she's mine—and she's all I have in the world—but because every one tells me so.

"I know what you're afraid of. You've written it so often. You're afraid she'll change. You think she'll become like so many others.

"You're wrong, Mr. Hellinger. Others may change. But not my little Alma. Not my little girl. Because she's different."

I told the mother that I would help her. . . .

* * *

As things transpired, the girl did not need my help. For it was only two or three days later that she won a beauty contest conducted by a small Jersey paper in the town in which she lived with her mother.

A month or so following the contest, the Ziegfeld office announced the signing of a new beauty. It was just a line or two. But, as it turned out, these lines formed a plot for a complete novel.

The lines were published. The following day found the mother sending me the newspaper clipping. And with it, a letter.

"Just watch my little girl, Mr. Hellinger," she wrote. "She's going to go far and I would appreciate any help you might give her. She will some day give you an opportunity for a different kind of a story. Because she's a different girl." . . .

Since then, I have used that daughter's picture very often. You have seen it in many papers many times. She is today one of Broadway's best known showgirls. She has figured in two scandals that made the papers—and five or six that did not.

I met her recently in a night club. I had seen her frequently on previous occasions. But she never mentioned that episode in my office. And neither did I.

On this particular night, she brought it up of her own volition. She spoke of her mother. And I asked her how she was feeling. Those eyes, so soft at sixteen and so hard at eighteen, met mine. They did not drop now.

"I hardly know how mother is," she responded languidly. "I see her so seldom, you know. Rehearsals—and all that."

A few days later, while driving through West 39th st., I was stalled in traffic. From a department store on that block stepped a woman. I recognized her immediately. It was the girl's mother.

I blew my horn, and waved to her. She stepped over. We shook hands. And she told me she was working as a saleslady in that store.

I said the wrong thing. I generally do.

"How is your daughter?" I said stupidly. "Is she doing well?"

The mother looked at me. She was wondering how much I knew.

"Very well," she murmured. "I want to thank you for all you've done for her. It's been very sweet of you. She's a very good girl. She's—she's—she's different. Isn't she?"

She hurried away. So did I. . . .

XLI.

THE GIRLS

MISS A. is a tall and beautiful blonde. I don't know how blonde she was three years ago, but I can't see what that has to do with the case anyhow. Today she is very statuesque and very blonde.

She seems to have plenty of jewelry. Each time she hooks a new sucker, she evidently hooks him for plenty. She is only too happy to brag about it to the other girls. It makes many of them wish they could be like her.

"Look what that dope gave me last night," she will cry on the average of once a month, as she flashes a new rock. "Isn't it a pip? Every time he holds my hand he thinks he's one station from heaven.

"Some guys are just born dumb. And it takes a baby like me to find out where the pickings are best."

Miss A. has orchids in her dressing room practically every night. She gives most of them to her dresser or to the other girls. She doesn't care about orchids, even when they cost $10 each. She would exchange all of them for one little daisy from a certain guy.

But the certain guy can't send flowers. He's in jail—and he'll be there for a long time to come.

Miss A. rides in the finest of cars. She eats in the very best of restaurants. She vacations at Palm Beach and Miami. The very best clothes are bought for her. Surely, you will say, she must be very happy.

But that's where you'd be wrong. In spite of the things she has, in spite of the presents she gets, in spite of the pleasures she seeks—her life is as empty as a reporter's pockets.

She's a very unhappy girl . . .

* * *

Miss B. dresses in the same room as Miss A. Miss B. is a brunette—and always has been. Miss B. lives at home with her parents.

There are no presents for Miss B. There are no boy friends or elderly swains to call her her in a Rolls-Royce. There are no vacations for her in a southern clime. Her only relaxation arrives on a Sunday afternoon when her father propels the family car toward the seashore. He doesn't always get there, but you must give him credit for trying.

Miss B. is studying to be a great musical comedy star. In the morning she takes lessons in dancing and singing. In the afternoon, when there is no matinee, she is studying at a dramatic school. Her parents predict great things for her. Don't the teachers, to whom they pay their money, tell them so?

Thus, Miss B. sees the years drifting by. She is studying and studying and studying—but she is still in the chorus. The producer tells her that, in the very next show, he will have a nice part for her. He always, he tells her, rewards ambition and hard work.

The young lady has grown to be a bit skeptical of the producer's honeyed words. He has been telling her the same thing for the last three seasons.

It may be that Miss B. will be a great musical star some day. Right now, however, she's longing for a bit of life. She's yearning for a little of Miss A's jewelry and just a tiny part of her good times.

Miss B. is an unhappy girl . . .

* * *

Miss C. is in the same show. She does the same work as

Miss A. and Miss B. Yet her life is vastly different from other girls in the company.

Miss C. has been married for three years. Unlike Miss A., she wears no brooches or diamonds. She wears but one ring—and that one is a wedding ring. Unlike Miss B., she has no musical comedy aspirations. She knows that she will never be anything more than what she is. But she hasn't the time to worry about it.

This girl has a baby—and a husband—and a little home. Her husband does not earn too much money. And she works so that they might have sufficient for their needs.

In the morning, Miss C. is up at seven o'clock to prepare a breakfast for her husband. When he is ready to leave, she holds him close and kisses him goodby. Then she turns to her baby and her housework.

In the evening she is tired. Yet she must work. She enters the dusty subway and rides to the theatre. And there she stands on a stage beside Miss A. of the diamonds and Miss B., who might some day be a musical star.

When her work is over, she again must ride in that fearful subway. Her husband and her baby are waiting for her. She kisses them both and prepares herself for bed. Soon she has fallen into a deep sleep. A peaceful sleep.

Thus, in spite of the fact that she hasn't what the other girls have, Miss C. has a home, and a husband and an adorable baby. And is she happy? Not by a damned sight . . .

XLII.

ENCOURAGEMENT

A NEW musical comedy was scheduled to go into rehearsal. The producer, a man whose ideas differ vastly from those of other producers, was looking for talent. His idea was—and still is, I imagine—that talent should be discovered rather than bought. He dislikes dealing with established stars and feels he is better off developing new stars of his own. He's perfectly right, too. The only trouble with the idea is that he can't find the proper talent. Which is rather an important detail.

However, this producer dropped into a motion picture theatre one afternoon. He leaned back drowsily as the prologue to the feature was presented.

It was the usual thing. A huge orchestra. Some dreary dancers and an ensemble that howled for all it was worth, which wasn't much. A master of ceremonies, trying his best to be funny and succeeding only in being exceptionally dull. Then a specialty or two.

Suddenly the producer leaned forward. A kid was on the stage—a good-looking kid who played the banjo. For some forty seconds, this boy ran his fingers over the banjo with lightning-like rapidity. Just one chorus and he was through. The crowd applauded heartily.

The producer arose and went backstage. A few minutes later, he was being introduced to Joe, the kid with the banjo . .

* * *

After a few minutes of conversation, the producer suddenly popped the question.

"Joe," he said affably, "how would you like to go into my new show?"

The boy's eyes opened wide with delight.

"Gee, Mr. S.," he responded, "that certainly is something I've dreamed about for a long time. I'd love to be with you, sir. And I know I'll make good if you'll only give me the chance."

The producer nodded.

"You'll get the chance, Joe," he asserted. "I'll have a lot of things for you in this show. Drop into my office tomorrow morning. Good night."

The producer departed. And that night the kid named Joe tumbled into bed and smiled peacefully through sweet dreams of his name in big, flashing, powerful electric lights . . .

The next morning found Joe in the producer's office at an early hour. It didn't take them long to come to terms. For, no matter what terms the producer offered, it was a term to the right for Joe.

Joe was to come to the first rehearsal the week following. He left the office. And the producer looked over his scripts and called in his authors.

"Boys," he said, "I have the find of the season. He's a young boy—but he's handsome and likeable. I'm going to spot him all through the show. He's really excellent. Just wait and you'll see. Meanwhile, I want some special numbers for him. Something like this . . ."

And he talked on and on and on. . .

Some three weeks passed. Rehearsals of the new show were in full swing. The producer had made good on his word to Joe. The handsome kid and his banjo specialty were standing out through the entire show.

Everybody in the company liked the boy. He seemed so unaffected. So fresh. So un-Broadwayish. And so enthusaistic.

Sadly enough, though, the boy was not doing as well as the producer had imagined. He played his banjo well enough. But when it came to doing four or five numbers through the same show, there was too much sameness in his routine.

The authors of the piece sat in at rehearsals. When Joe came on they shook their heads sadly.

"A nice boy," they told the producer, "but not strong enough to be spotted the way you've done. Cut him down. Cut him down."

The producer hated to do it. He liked the boy so much. But he realized regretfully that he had been a trifle too enthusiastic. The boy, of course, was still good. But there was evidently something lacking.

So one of his numbers was taken away. Then another was cut. Then another. Finally there was nothing left but his original banjo specialty.

With each cut Joe felt the situation more and more keenly. This was his first opportunity, his first glorious chance. Why were they doing this to him? He wanted to ask someone, anyone. But there was none to whom he could turn . . .

The show was about to open out of town. It was running too long. So the producer called a consultation of his staff and questioned them on what should be cut from the show.

One of them spoke up. And he echoed the sentiments of the rest.

"We all like this fellow, Joe," he said. "He's a nice fellow —a sweet guy—and all that. But he doesn't mean a thing. I think, since we must cut, that he ought to be the first to go."

The producer shook his head.

"After all, boys," was his response, "there must be something in this business besides cold cash. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's the way I feel.

"You see, I picked this boy out of nowhere. He has looked up to me as though I were a god. I've watched his face as we took his numbers away one by one. It hurt me damned near as much as it hurt him. I can't fire that kid right now. I just can't do it.

"We'll take him out of town with us. I'll take that one number away from him and give him a little comedy bit to fill in. We'll tell him to stick around and wait.

"I don't want to hurt him anymore than I have to, boys. I'm sorry. But I'm just that kind of a guy."

The show left New York and went to a nearby city in preparation for its opening. Joe went along. But he was not the same Joe that first went to rehearsals with a buoyant step and a boyish happiness.

His eyes had grown harder. His lips were set in a thinner line. He was learning his Broadway . . .

* * *

On the day the show was scheduled for its out-of-town opening, the producer went to his protege.

"Joe," he said. "We're going to try and find a spot for you tonight if we possibly can. Your specialty number is out for the time being because the show runs so terribly long. But we may put it back any moment. So stick close backstage all the time.

"Meanwhile, we have something else for you. Three times during the show, you're to take your banjo out, grab a chair and commence to play the 'Rhapsody in Blue'. After you've played the first few bars, the stage manager will shout 'Okay, Eddie'—and you walk off the stage. Get it?

"It's a comedy part. You'll get plenty of laughs with it. Of course—the way it looks as I outline it to you—it's only to fill in stage wait. But it means more than that, Joe. Much more. And while you're doing that, I'll try to find some spot for your specialty."

"All right, Boss," Joe responded. "Whatever you do is fair enough for me. I'll get plenty of laughs with that funny bit. Thanks."

But he turned away in a hurry . . .

Eight-fifteen found Joe fully dressed in the tuxedo he had purchased expressly for the opening. The stage manager walked by and looked at him.

"Those aren't clothes for a comedy bit, Joe," he suggested. "Run upstairs and get a coupla laughs into your make-up. Keep the top business on, but put a pair of golf knickers over your pants and dig up a pair of big shoes from somewhere.

"You're supposed to be funny, boy. Funny. Like this. Ha-ha! Funny. Get me?"

Joe looked at him.

"But how," he murmured brokenly, "how about my specialty?"

The stage manager grinned.

"O, sure," he answered. "We'll take care of that. But first get funny." . . .

At nine o'clock, Joe made his first entrance. As he stepped upon the stage, the audience laughed at his eccentric make-up. The laugh struck terror to his heart. But he sat himself in a chair, placed his beloved banjo on his lap and began to play.

A few seconds later came the cry, "Okay, Eddie." Joe looked into the wings, stopped abruptly, grabbed his chair and ran off. The audience laughed. It was, they felt, a novel way to fill a stage wait.

Later in the evening, Joe did the same thing over again. Still later, he went through the same gesture. Each time, the audience laughed a bit louder. The third time they actually applauded a bit.

But no one said a word about his specialty. All through the show, he waited for some one to tell him it was time for his big number.

But no one ever came . . .

The second night came and went. Again there was no specialty. Just those same few bars, that monotonous "Okay, Eddie"—and off. He wasn't waiting around for that specialty so long now. Perhaps he knew it was never coming.

On the third night, as he came off from his first stage wait, the producer passed. Joe reached out and touched his arm.

"I don't want to bother you, sir," he said. "I know you're very busy. But I was just wondering if my specialty—if you intended—if you thought—"

The producer stopped.

"No, Joe," he answered kindly. "It's not going in. I'm sorry. The show's a little too long as it is. Maybe in New York . . ."

Joe bit his lip. He stood there, his head low. For some fifteen minutes, he acted as though he were in a trance. Finally the stage manager nudged him.

"Get out there, Joe," he cried. "It's time for another of your big hits."

The boy straightened up. He picked up his banjo with a snap and strolled out upon the stage. The audience laughed. He began the "Rhapsody in Blue". A few seconds went by and the audience heard the familiar cry.

"Okay, Eddie," were the words.

But this time the boy failed to arise. Instead his fingers flashed across the instrument with even greater rapidity than before.

The cry became more insistent.

"Okay, Eddie," shouted the stage manager. "Okay, Eddie."

Joe never stopped for an instant.

"Say it again," he breathed as he played on and on. "Say it again. And again. And again. I hate you all. Say it again, I tell you. Say it again."

Consternation reigned backstage. But that boy played on and on. He played that marvelous number as though his very soul were part and parcel of it. He saw nothing. He cared for nothing. He played then as he had never played before.

At the final note, the audience went wild. They cheered and applauded. He had stirred them mightily. But he seemed to care nothing for the applause. Looking neither to the right, nor the left, he walked rapidly from the stage.

The company made way for him as he strolled off to the stage door. Reaching there, he turned and saw the stage manager immediately behind him. Then he smiled.

"I know what you're going to say," he shouted. "You're going to say that I held up your show and that I'm no good. All right. Maybe I know it. This is my good-bye to all of you. I'm through."

Lifting the banjo, he hurled it with all his force at the stone wall. Swishing through the air, it landed—and broke into a hundred pieces.

Joe turned, walked through the door, up the street and disappeared. . . .

* * *

That company never saw Joe again. He never returned for any of his clothes. He never asked for any salary. To this day, the producer hasn't the slightest idea what became of the boy.

But, after all, who was there to care what became of him? No one. really. Except, perhaps, Joe . . .

XLIII.

A GAME WITH DEATH

IN YEARS gone by when it was legal for people to drink and nobody got half as soused as they do today, many saloon owners had a profitable sideline. They would pick out certain individuals who looked as though they were but two steps from the grave and insure their lives for several thousand dollars. The policies, of course, were payable to them.

A despicable thing. Certainly. But many saloon owners did it—and they could see little harm in the trick. The unfortunates who were insured had but little time to live anyhow. The saloon owner then plied them with drinks—free of charge. The insured man thus moved a little closer to his grave, and the saloon owner a little closer to his money.

Since prohibition descended upon us I haven't heard much about this racket. As a matter of fact, I didn't hear about it at all until recently, when the story that follows was related to me. I do not ask you to believe it. I merely recite it to you as a good yarn that is supposed to be true. . .

* * *

John Doyle was a very sick man. He lived on the lower East Side in a dingy tenement. He looked the typical bum.

About a year ago John Doyle visited a doctor. The doctor was in one of those hospital clinics maintained for poor people. A severe cough was worrying John. He dropped into the clinic one afternoon.

The doctor looked him over.

"If you live three months," he informed the down-and-outer, "I will be very much surprised. Are you a heavy drinker?"

Doyle admitted that he was. The doctor nodded.

"There is no medicine that can save you. If you can get any money, go to the mountains at once. That's the only advice I can give you."

John Doyle walked from the clinic. He bummed a quarter from one passerby and a dime from another. With the thirty five cents clenched in his fist, he hurried to his favorite speakeasy. Around eleven o'clock that night, the sick man was still in the speakeasy. He was drunk now. He had unfolded the tale of his sad condition to anyone who would listen. As they listened they bought him drinks.

The gentleman who supplied the spot with alleged liquor drifted in. He looked over at Doyle, who was swaying at the bar.

"Yesh, boys," he heard Doyle say. "I'm a goner in three months. In three months I'm a goner. Doct' saysh to me that I got to go away to live. I don't want to go 'way. I'm gonna die right here in lil' ole New York. Thass the place to die."

The bootlegger arched his eyebrows. Here was a great case for the old time insurance racket. He had worked with a phoney doctor before. Why not again?

He led Doyle to one side.

"Look here, bo," murmured the bootlegger. "I just heard you sayin' you ain't got long to live. Is that right?"

Doyle shook his head drunkenly.

"Thass right. Only got three months to go. Thass all. Maybe even less. Will you buy lil' drink?"

The bootlegger tapped Doyle's arm.

"Listen, feller," he whispered, "Not only am I going to buy you plenty of drinks, but I'm goin' to give you a hundred bucks in the bargain. Here's how you can earn the century."

And the racketeer explained the old gag. Insurance to the extent of $8,000 was to be taken out in the name of John Doyle. A phoney doctor would give him a hurried examination, pass him through, and cut with the bootlegger when Doyle had gone to another world. The bootlegger, of course, would pay the premium.

"Shay," cried Doyle, "thass okey by me. I got nothin' to lose an' a hundred bucks to gain. Sure I'll do it, ole pal."

The two men shook hands. They agreed to meet on the morrow . . .

Everything went according to schedule. The gyping docter looked at Doyle the following day and asked him how he felt.

"Fine," said Doyle.

"I'm glad to hear it," said the doctor. "Sign this paper, I find you in very good condition."

Doyle grinned. He was given his hundred dollars. The doctor grinned. The bootlegger grinned. Everybody was happy. And the quicker that John Doyle would die, the happier they all would be. . . .

But fate has a queer way of shifting things around. The three months passed with John Doyle drinking more than ever. The cough was still with him—but it was growing no worse. Four months passed. Five months.

The bootlegger was growing a trifle nervous. In addition to the $100 for Doyle, the premium on the policy had been more than $150.

Uncanny luck seemed to follow John Doyle. There was a fire in his tenement house one night. Two people were burned to death. Doyle wasn't there. He had stepped out of his bed and gone around the corner for a drink.

The bootlegger thought of slipping the man a little poison liquor. Nobody would ever know the difference. He would be found dead and people would all say he died just as they had expected. But the bootlegger felt he would wait a little longer before taking such a drastic step. After all, he couldn't linger much longer. . . .

One Saturday night, Doyle stood in the familiar speakeasy. The joint was crowded. The register tinkled merrily. Men jostled one another in an effort to reach the bar. Doyle sat in a corner, his head in his hands.

Suddenly came loud voices.

"I ain't pushin' nobody."

"You were so. You was pushin' me."

"You're a dirty liar."

Doyle raised his head. He knew what was coming. He had heard too many of these arguments not to know. Maybe there would be trouble. Maybe not. Best thing to do was to get out—fast.

He started for the door. The voices grew louder.

"Call me a liar, you dirty ——. Call me that, will you? Call me——"

Another voice. Shrieking.

"For God's sake, fellers. Look out. He's got a gun!"

Fearful words. Doyle had reached the door. Before he could catch the knob the door was thrown open. It hit Doyle and he fell to the floor. A drunk staggered in. A shot rang out from the rear. The drunk fell to the floor with a bullet through his heart.

The drunk who had thrown open that door had saved John Doyle's worthless life. Doyle arose and glanced at the dead man's face. He whistled softly and staggered out into the night before the first policeman arrived.

The dead man was the bootlegger who had insured his life. . .

XLIV.

IN THE BALANCE

A FEW years ago a young English actor named Gordon arrived in this country. He had played several fairly important parts in London, but he felt that his chances for stardom were greater in America. So over he came, with the world before him.

Gordon was a young chap then. He's a young chap today. He is, perhaps, thirty years of age. He looks older.

The first year in America, Gordon did fairly well. Nothing to shout about from the housetops. But well enough for a start. He appeared in two productions.

With things looking fairly bright, then, Gordon fell in love. The girl was a showgirl in a Ziegfeld production, and the actor went for her like Garbo in a clinch. After his show was out, he ran over to call for her every evening. She liked him. His curly hair. His boyishness. His English accent and very correct diction.

In due time, they were married. He took her from Ziegfeld and placed her in an apartment for two. She made him orange juice in the mornings and he took her out for dinner. At night he worked in the theatre. And time hung heavy on her hands.

About a year after the marriage a baby was born. Gordon was in seventh heaven. But it's not certain that his wife was even in the first one.

When it came time for Gordon to go on the road, he asked if she would take the baby and come with him. She shook her head.

"That's not for me, Gordon." she replied, "I don't want to travel. If you don't mind, I'll take the child and go out for a visit to my folks in Wisconsin. We'll all be better off."

The actor didn't think so—but he had no choice in the matter. He started on a road tour with his company and kissed his wife good-bye at the station. She went to Wisconsin—and out of his life.

Gordon didn't know all this, however. He lived with the pictures of his wife and his kid, and he wrote her long letters. They were separated for some time, and her letters to him stopped coming completely. Finally came the news that she had fallen in love with another man and was suing him for divorce.

The actor went around in a daze. His friends tried to comfort him. One of his pals suggested that he fight the case.

"Go out and battle with her," urged the friend. "Show her that you're entitled to some consideration."

The young actor merely gazed at the floor.

"It wouldn't do any good," he murmured hopelessly. "When a woman doesn't love you, there's no use fighting."...

* * *

Time flew by. Gordon was divorced now. His wound had healed to a great extent.

He was on the road with an English drama that had created a tremendous success in this country. His part was excellent, and he was filling it to perfection.

His company hit Atlantic City one week. The very first night in that resort, after the opening of the play, Gordon attended a party. He was introduced to a beautiful girl, a former "Miss Atlantic City" in the beauty pageant. And when he took her home from the party that night, he knew that he was in love for the second time in his life.

Perhaps it was all he had gone through. Perhaps it was the great disappointment in his first wife. Perhaps it was anything you choose to call it. At any rate, he felt that if he could make this girl his wife, a new happiness would come to him.

For a week Gordon courted the girl. They went everywhere together. She saw the play three times that week—and waited for Gordon backstage. When the show closed that Saturday night he took her home and sat upon the arm of her chair.

"I love you," he said simply. "You must know that. I haven't much to offer you—but all that I have is yours. I will be a devoted husband to you if—"

The girl stopped him. She peered at him through frightened eyes.

"Don't say any more," she whispered. "I was afraid you were going to say what you've said.

"I can't marry you, Gordon. I admire you very much as a friend. But that is all. I am engaged to another man. And it's he whom I love."

The blow was a horrible one. The actor walked into the night and sat by the sea until the following morning. He contemplated suicide—but he fought it off. The girl had been very unfair to him. She should not have led him on. Perhaps if he went back to her home and—

But he didn't. When the dawn came up, he walked slowly back to his hotel and began to pack.

"It wouldn't do any good to see her again," he told himself. "When a woman doesn't love you, there's no use fighting." . . .

* * *

Gordon came back to New York and did what so many men have done before him. And what so many men will continue to do long after he has been shipped to another world in a wooden box. He went on a terrific bat and sought to embrace any woman who would look at him.

He tossed away a film contract he had signed. He neglected to show up for a play that was then in rehearsals. And he awakened one morning to find himself both sick and broke.

He had few friends left. You don't keep many pals when you're on a bat. They like to talk about you—but they seldom rise to help you. And Gordon found that his one remaining friend was a woman.

She was a woman he had met in his drunken moments. She was not what the world terms a respectable woman because she depended upon a sugar papa to rent her apartments and pay her bills. But she was regular. Far more regular—and probably more moral—than many of those who tread the slippery path of virtue and secretly envy women like her.

She fell in love with Gordon and helped to bring him back. When Gordon was stupidly drunk and put in phone calls to that girl in Atlantic City, she would sit in another room and cry. Gordon knew nothing about these things. He treated her as a good friend—and she asked for nothing more.

It was this woman who finally nursed him back to health. She paid his hotel bills and moved him to a cheaper residence. Today, he's on his feet again.

And the woman who loves him? Well, maybe Gordon has an inkling of her real feelings. But he'd rather not know. And the woman will never tell him.

"It wouldn't do any good to tell him," she told a friend the other day, "he cares for me only as a friend. And when a man doesn't love a woman, there's no use fighting." . . .

XLV.

HARD-BOILED

YOU would call her, I suppose, hard-boiled. In her game, she has to be. Night after night, she stands near the door of the club in which she works and checks the hats and coats of men who come in stag and fall out stagger. Her's is a mighty tough racket—and she's a pretty tough baby.

She works in one of those speakeasies in the forties. One of those places, you know, that only pop into the papers when they are raided. There is a long bar, a couple of singing waiters, a room with some badly battered tables and chairs and a cash register. Over the register hangs a framed motto. It reads: "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home."

It was early in the evening and the room was just commencing to fill. As she helped me off with my coat, a button fell to the floor.

"Damn it," I muttered crossly. "There goes another button. One more and I won't be able to close this fool coat. And it's raining out, too."

She hung the coat on a hook and handed me a check.

"Stop squawkin'," she cried, "I get enough of that stuff from the other dopes around here all night long. I'm gettin' sick and tired of it all, I can tell you."

I grinned at her.

"What's the matter, Mildred? Tired of life, and all that?"

"You said a coupla mouthfuls," she returned. "What can a dame like me get outa life—hanging around a dump like this night after night? All I connect with is lousy people and lousier tips. You know that. You've written about it often enough."

I nodded.

"Sure," I agreed. "But what's the use of crying about it? If you don't like it, why don't you get out and do something else?"

"Can't," she responded shortly. "A girl like me can't make enough dough at any other racket. And I gotta take care of the kid."

"Kid? I didn't know you had a baby."

"Sure, He's three years old now. Here's a picture of him. Ain't he the cute one?"

She handed me a photograph of a terrible looking brat.

"Beautiful child," I said, handing the picture back to her. "But how about your husband? Doesn't he help you out every now and then?"

She laughed mirthlessly.

"Don't make me snicker that way. You'll loosen my teeth. Gawd knows where he is now. Last I heard of him was two years ago in Denver. And then he was havin' a little contest with the bootleggers. He was tryin' to see if he couldn't drink the stuff just a little faster than they could make it. At last reports, he was a little in the lead."

"Tough," was the only thing I could think of to say.

She nodded.

"You said it," she continued. "An' that's why I'm kickin' about my life. I don't get no romance. As a matter of fact, there ain't no such thing as romance, if you get to thinkin' about it. It's all a lotta applesauce.

"What happens night after night? A lotta guys get stewed and then come pawin' around me. Is that romance? So's your Aunt Tilly.

"Look at that guy in the corner with his arms around that broad. He's married and got two kids. The gal with him used to be a dance hall instructress but she developed corns, or somethin'. Look at them sittin' there and cryin' into their beers together. He's got a hold on her like Phil Scott had on Sharkey—and she's doin' her share too.

"But is that love? Is that romance? It's a lotta baloney, that's what it is."

She paused for breath. And I slipped a word in.

"But, Mildred, you can't judge the whole world by the types you see in this cheap saloon."

"That's where you're all wet," she flashed. "The guys I see in here are the same guys the world over. Ain't one alive that's decent, deep down. The whole crew of 'em are a bunch of fakin', cheatin' fourflushers. Bad as most dames is, there ain't one that ain't better than the guys that make 'em bad.

"When I read some o' them mush stories o' yours about love and romance, I gotta laugh out loud. Jeez, how stupid some o' you writin' guys can be! Why don't you tell the public the truth some day? Let 'em in on the secret that we're livin' in a bum world—and that this love stuff is just so much bunk."

I laughed.

"You're a hard-boiled baby, Mildred."

"Yeah?" she said.

"Yeah," I said . . . . . .

* * *

I left her and walked through the room to the bar. After speaking to the proprietor for some twenty minutes and learning nothing about anything, I decided to leave. Handing Mildred a quarter, I bought my coat back.

"So long, wise guy," she murmured.

I nodded and walked from the place. When I hit the rain, I discovered how the hard-boiled girl had spent some of the twenty minutes that I was away from her.

She had sewed the button on my overcoat . . .

XLVI.

A GENTLEMAN ALWAYS BELIEVES

THIS is the story of a wise guy. The smartest man in Hollywood, they called him. He owns a hotel in that funny town—and you must admit that such a business requires wisdom. For the sake of clarity we'll call him Frank.

Frank, to hear him tell it, knows all there is to be known about everything. Without stopping for breath, he can tell you the winner of next year's English Derby, why Calvin Coolidge never gets hoarse, Fannie Ward's exact age, the size of Douglas Fairbanks's hat, and the receipts at the Roxy Theatre next Christmas Day. And when it comes to women—ah, my friends, that's where the story really begins.

For eight years Frank has had the same sweetheart. For reasons best known to themselves, Frank and the girl were never married. She is, of course, his common law wife. The folks around Hollywood always refer to her as Mrs. Frank. But they never took the trouble to get a license and make it official.

The girl—and I think Martha would be a nice name for her—is a very naughty little lady. When Frank first met her she was playing small parts in pictures. She was also playing a couple of producers.

For a man who thought himself the smartest chap in Hollywood, it was surprising how little Frank knew about Martha. He felt, of course, that he knew all about her. But what she wasn't doing to him was a crime. He told all his friends that she was the most faithful little soul in the world. And his friends were very nice about it. They never laughed at him—until his back was turned.

Just about a year ago Frank made up his mind to go to Agua Caliente for a little gambling. He asked Martha to go with him. But she shook her head.

"No, Frank darling," she replied. "You go on along with the boys. You know that I never want to interfere with your pleasures. You go ahead. I'll stay here in Hollywood."

So Frank kissed her nobly, yanked out his book of Mexican addresses and departed with the boys. The minute he was gone, Martha was on the telephone. She called a certain director who, if he were mentioned in this book, would drop dead wherever he is. He's one of the few good directors left in Hollywood. So we'll just leave his name out and let him live.

"He's gone, darling," cried Martha excitedly. "Do you want to see me tonight?"

The director coughed.

"Why wait until tonight, my sweet one?" he retorted. "Come on right over. Will you? That's great. I'll be waiting."

Lest you be too shocked, I might explain right here and now that this director meant a great deal to Martha. All men meant a great deal to her—but this megaphone wielder was something special. Frank went on frequent trips. And whenever he left, the director was the first man Martha called. This time, things had gone exactly on schedule.

The director and Martha spent the afternoon together. Around eight o'clock they decided to have dinner in a Russian restaurant on the outskirts of Hollywood. And just before they left the house the director called Martha to him.

"Honey," he murmured, "I've been wanting to give you a little present for some time. I can't give you any jewelry because Frank would get wise. So I've decided to let you pick out your own little present. Here's a check for $500."

It was a foolish thing, I will admit, for the director to do. But directors are foolish anyhow, or they wouldn't be directors in the first place. So he handed the check to Martha. She kissed him fervently, placed the check in her bag—and out they went.

At the Russian restaurant they enjoyed their meal immensely. As they sat and ate slowly, two friends of the director sauntered in. They were from Chicago and not in the picture business. So the director felt safe in introducing them to Martha and urging them to sit down.

The men did so. One of them produced a bottle and the drinks were served. Time rolled along. One of the Chicagoans glanced at his watch.

"Say," he cried. "There are big doings in the Blossom rooms at the Roosevelt Hotel. Swell party of some kind. Suppose we all run over?"

The director shook his head. He was tired—and he knew, too, that it would be bad policy to be seen in public with Martha. He said he would be unable to go.

One of the strangers looked at Martha and suggested that she, perhaps would care to join them. She nodded.

"Yes, indeed," she replied. "I'd like to go. That is, if Mr.—— doesn't mind."

The director said he didn't mind in the least. He went home. And Martha went to the Roosevelt with the two men. . . .

There was a great Hollywood party at the Roosevelt that night. Even Mary Pickford was present—and when Mary steps out it's an event.

Martha was having the time of her life. She was also getting plenty stewed. She drank more and more. And we now draw the curtain over the ensuing hours and find the director's phone ringing in his bedroom the next morning. He answered it—and it proved to be from one of the two men who had taken Martha out the night before.

"Say," cried the friend, "I just wanted to thank you for introducing me to the little dame last night. She was a pip. Just left a few minutes ago. She danced herself into unconsciousness and insisted on staying at our house all night. What a dame she is!"

The director mumbled something and hung up the phone. He was furious. What a cheap thing to do! The more he thought about it, the wilder he became. On the spur of the moment, he called his bank and stopped payment on the $500 check he had given her the night before.

Four days later the director had another call. It was Frank. And the director was flabbergasted when he heard Frank's name.

"I'm calling you for Martha," said Frank, the man who knew everything. "What's the idea of stopping that check for $500?"

The director almost fell through the floor.

"Do you mean to say," he demanded, "that Martha told you about that?"

Frank's voice grew very pompous.

"Told me about it?" he repeated. "And why shouldn't she? You can't get away with that sort of stuff, you know, just because she's a woman. And an innocent woman at that."

The director choked.

"L—l—listen," he stammered. "Will you please tell me just what Martha told you? I want to get this thing straight."

Frank spoke swiftly.

"What could Martha tell me," he shouted, "except the truth? She lent you $500 some time ago. She asked you for the money the other day, and you gave her your check. Then you stopped it."

The director saw red. His temper got the best of him.

"She told you that, did she?" he howled. "Well, now I'll tell you something about your sweet little Martha. In the past year, whenever you've been out of town, she's been my sweetheart. That's how she got my check.

"She didn't tell you that, did she?"

Frank went crazy. He threatened to have the director bumped off in an hour. The director told him to go to hell. . .

A week later, because both men have plenty of friends in Hollywood, they were brought together. Frank said he knew the director was lying. And the director asked for proof.

Into Frank's pocket went his hand. With a triumphant florish, he drew forth a sheet of paper.

"Look here," he said. "Here's a statement from Martha's doctor. She got it almost three years ago. It says she has a weak heart and that any dancing, physical strain, or sexual excitement would kill her. That's why we never go out and that's why I know you're a liar."

The director glanced at the paper. And it suddenly dawned upon him what a clever woman this Martha was. In order that Frank might never suspect her, she had gone to the trouble of getting a fraudulent medical report. The director admired cleverness. He arose and bowed low.

"All I can say, sir," he murmured, "is that I am a liar. Before everybody here, I apologize to both you and her. I can say no more."

Martha and Frank are still together. He believes everything she tells him. A gentleman always believes. . . .

XLVII.

"SWEET MYSTERY OF LIFE"

MICKEY WALKER'S favorite song is Victor Herbert's "Sweet Mystery Of Life." I'm telling you that right at the beginning because it was Mickey, himself, who told me the story I'm giving to you now. You know Mickey, don't you? Well, at least, you know of him. Mickey Walker is the middleweight champion of the world.

I like Mickey. So does almost everyone else, I guess. More people praise him in a day than speak to you or me in ten years. The girls lift their glasses to him and, in severe cases, I know a number of gals who would lift their faces for him. The backslappers are always around him.

But Mickey is no fool. He takes this type of praise with a grain of salt. For he knows well that, when he is a has-been, nothing will be so cold as the back of a man who once was a backslapper. . . .

* * *

Mickey Walker is about twenty-nine years old at the present time. So it can't be more than eleven or twelve years or so ago that he was just one of the kids in a town known as Elizabeth, New Jersey.

He went to school. He had an uncle who wanted him to be an architect. He had a father who never dreamed his boy would be a prizefight champion and would have slapped him plenty had he thought it. He had a few girl friends. He had a few boy friends. He was young and didn't give much thought to the future.

There were parties, of course. At least twice a week.

Mickey was a well built kid with broad shoulders and a funny little nose that turned up. One or two of the girls permitted him to hold their hands. The rest of them merely treated him as one of the mob and let it go at that. After all, he wasn't the best looking boy in the neighborhood by several million miles.

There was a best looking boy. There generally is. He answered to the name of Joe and he was about three years older than Mickey Walker. When a party took place, the girls gathered around him like the flappers around Rudy Vallee.

For, in addition to his looks, Joe had a voice. During a party, when the demands grew insistent enough, Joe would sing. Generally the popular numbers of the day—God forbid. And then, if a truly pretty damsel requested it, Joe would give them "Sweet Mystery of Life."

When Joe sang "Sweet Mystery of Life," it was Mickey Walker's happiest moment. It made him yearn for things that were very vague. I can't put down on paper exactly what I mean but I imagine we've all felt the same way at times. A great piece of acting, a remarkable run in a football game, a stirring piece of music brilliantly played—these things always have the same effect on me.

Mickey Walker envied Joe. To him, Joe represented everything that was wonderful in life. Joe worked and always had money in his pocket. Joe had plenty of girls. Joe was handsome. And Joe's voice was a thing of beauty.

Sweet mystery of life! Powerful words. Strange words. And Mickey wondered. Would he ever be as well liked as Joe? Would he some day be a popular favorite in the neighborhood? Would he ever amount to anything in this world?

In his heart, he doubted it. All during his life, he felt, he would go on envying Joe and all the others like him. . . .

* * *

Let's draw the curtain over a period of years and carry Mickey Walker to San Francisco a couple of years ago. If you ever turn to the sporting pages you must know what happened to that pug-nosed kid from New Jersey.

He entered the fight game and succeeded where so many thousands failed. He became welterweight champion of the world, lost his title and then fought his way back to victory in an even higher class. Today, he is middleweight champion and was recently picked by national sporting writers as the best fighting man of any weight in the universe.

During his career Mickey made some very foolish moves. But nobody can blame him for that. People who don't make mistakes aren't quite human. And I can't see them having very much fun either.

When he lost the welterweight championship and followed that disaster by being knocked out by Joe Dundee, they called him a tenth-rater and a has-been. But he gritted his teeth and fought his way up again. Because that's the sort of stuff that boy is made of.

One of Mickey Walker's great failings is the fact that he has a great fondness for late hours and night life. Unless he is in strict training for a fight, he is pretty sure to wind up the evening in some sort of a club. When Texas Guinan was giving the Government the run-around on Broadway Mickey was one of her best customers.

Those were the days when the Charleston was the raging dance of the land. Mickey would sit at a ringside table with a boyish grin upon his face.

Around three in the morning, Texas would call upon Mickey to dance.

"The greatest little fighter," she would yodel, "and the greatest little Charleston dancer in the world. Come on, Mickey. Show all the big society mugs around here what a stepper you are!"

And Mickey would dance. Women cheered him with shrieks of joy and old men shook baby rattles vigorously. Mickey was visibly happy.

Exactly why these things should amuse Mickey, I hesitate to say. Perhaps it is because he is now the center of attraction in any gathering. Perhaps it is because, as a boy in Elizabeth, New Jersey, he never had that attention. Perhaps it is because of Joe, the handsome one, and the memory of the impression that Joe always created. . . . .

At any rate, we find Mickey Walker in Frisco about two years ago. It was around two in the morning and Mickey was seated at a table in one of the lowliest dives on the Barbary Coast. You know the kind of place. Down eight steps to a cellar. A four piece orchestra. Waiters who slap things at you. Plenty of hostesses who sit with you and see that your check goes as high as possible. Plenty of smoke and no ventilation. And they call that fun!

With Mickey at the time was Jack Kearns, his dapper manager, and two damsels of uncertain age. One, whose name I am charitable enough to omit, was a big film star in the days of Pearl White and Maurice Costello. The other woman at the table was also a film player of some note in her day.

Both of these women were now hostesses in this rather stupid cafe. There were many younger and better looking women in the place. For some unknown reason, however, Jack Kearns had picked them out. And there they were.

Kearns filled three glasses with his customary Scotch. The fourth glass stayed empty. Walker wasn't drinking.

"Say, kid," said Kearns to the ex-film luminary, "tell us something about yourself. What are you doing in a dump like this?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Why ask me, Jack?" she returned. "You're one of the mob and you know the racket. I had a guy I loved, and when he croaked, I just hit the chutes. Booze did it as much as anything, I guess.

"Sometimes I'm glad that I'm hiding away in a spot like this. It would hurt like the devil to be down in Hollywood and have everybody know just what's happened to me.

"O, hell. Slip me another shot of belly grease and we'll all have laughs."

The women kept drinking. Mickey sat and watched them. As they drank, they became more and more talkative. Soon their speech became thick. One of them leaned toward him.

"Don't feel sorry for me, kid," she asserted. "I'm doing okay, see? Sure I used to be a big shot. I used to be around with Theda Bara and June Caprice and all the other big timers of the day.

"You don't hear no more about them, do you? Well, you don't hear no more about me either. So everything is even. Ain't it so?"

Mickey Walker nodded. Absently. This woman had been a celebrated figure in her day. Almost as famous as he was now. And look at her!

Where would he be in ten or fifteen years? No longer a prizefight champion. Certainly not. Well, what happened to all those ex-pugs? Most of them cutting paper dolls. Many of them janitors. Some of them beggars.

What did life hold for him? Where would he be in time to come? What—?

The woman was still talking.

"This joint is full of creepy things," she confessed. "See the leader of that bum orchestra? He was a pretty big guy in New York once. Sure. Used to lead a band in the swellest gyp joint on Broadway.

"Get him to play a number for you. He's a laugh. Can't hardly hold the fiddle at this stage of the game. Full of coke twenty hours of the day. Plain nuts, I think he is."

The place was growing smokier by the minute. Walker arose and asked the leader to play "Sweet Mystery of Life." The leader shook his head.

"Haven't played it in years," he stated. "My memory's not as good as it used to be. If you can get somebody to sing it with me—"

One of the waiters stepped out.

"I'll sing the damn thing," he muttered. "You follow me."

Mickey Walker resumed his seat. The orchestra played. Very badly. The waiter began to sing. Softly beautifully.

"Ah, sweet mystery of life,

"At last I've found you."

The cafe grew quiet. Walker closed his eyes. Wait! Something about that voice. Something familiar. Something that stirred the memory. Who? What? Where?

The middleweight champion opened his eyes and peered at the waiter. His fists clenched and his mouth opened wide in amazement. It was Joe! The man who had been his ideal in earlier days!

When the song was over, the place broke into cheers. No gathering can be half so enthusiastic and appreciative as a mob of drunks. He sang the number again. When he was through he walked to Mickey Walker's table.

"You recognize me, Mickey?" he inquired.

"Yes, Joe," was the fighter's response. "It must be ten years since I saw you. What are you doing in—?"

Joe stopped him.

"Don't ask me any questions, Mickey," he said "Got into a little jam and had to come out West. I'm hiding out here. And say, Mickey, can I ask you a favor?"

Walker nodded.

"Just forget that you saw me," said Joe quietly. "There are a couple of folks back home that wouldn't be too happy. And I want them to forget me."

Walker shook hands with Joe. He leaned back in his chair. The woman at his side plucked at his lapel. She was very drunk now.

"Shay, kid," she hiccoughed, "don't you get high hat wit' me. You're a helluva good fighter right now — but tha' don't mean you always gonna be.

"Didja jus' hear that song—'Sweet Mystery of Life?' Well, that orta be a lesson to you. You gotta wash your step, get me? We don't always stay the way we once were."

Mickey Walker looked at the wreck of the woman who had once been a star. Then he looked at the back of the waiter who had once been his ideal. And he shook his head slowly.

"I know it, lady," he murmured quietly. "I know it very well." . . . .

XLVIII.

STROLLING FREDDIE

I'M gonna straighten out," he cried, "as soon as I get to Frisco. If I make that town I'll be okay. Wish me luck, old kid. I'll see you some time again." . . .

* * *

Some years ago I frequented a joint in Greenwich Village that was then known as the Red Head. In those happy days, the Village meant more than it does today. And the Red Head at that time, was quite a noble hangout.

It was a rendezvous for dizzy flappers, retired chorines, hopheads, souses, perverts, poets and policemen. It was as dirty a dive as ever needed plenty of fresh air. Today, incidentally, the Red Head has become a flower shop. Beautiful blossoms have replaced the gin blossoms.

The proprietor of the Red Head at that time was a genial gentleman named Mr. Edward Winston. In those days, I had no Broadway column and no expense account with which to conduct one.

Accordingly, I would frequently sit in the Red Head and take cash while Mr. Winston played piano for the customers. Mr. Winston was vastly different from the cabaret proprietors of today. He was his own orchestra then, his own staff of assistants and his own bouncer. When business was bad, he was also his own patron.

Thus, as I sat in the Red Head, took cash and studied the characters, Mr. Winston would sometimes toss me a steak and a plate of soup. This made me deeply grateful to Mr. Winston who, in turn, seemed to take a fancy to me and assured me that I might some day have a cabaret of my own.

Once, much to my pride and satisfaction, Mr. Winston sat down and composed some music to a lyric I had written. It was a very sad lyric and was titled, as I recall, "When I Return." It rhymed "learn" and "yearn" and was really a very pretty affair.

My song was never published. But it should have been. It was bad enough. . . . .

Characters and incidents of those Village days often tumble through my mind. Fragments from the memory of a goofer, as the youthful Mr. Winchell might say.

The patrolman who would leave his beat every hour in order to play the drums for the dancers. . . Rosebud, the Shubert chorus boy . . . The taxi drivers with meters that jumped when you looked at them. . . Blind George, who played the piano and knew all the customers by their voices . . . The 14-year-old girl who picked up three or four "gentlemen friends" in a night and charged them $5 for a taxi ride around the block . . . Rudolph, the waiter, who once knocked a prominent heavyweight flat on his back because the latter called him a thick-headed Dutchman . . . All these—and a thousand more.

But there is one memory more poignant than the rest. And that concerns a boy with curly blonde hair and eyes of blue. His name was Freddie Jacks.

Of all the characters I have ever met, Freddie was the most complex. He would be meek and gentle as a flock of young lambs for days at a time. Suddenly he would fly into a rage —and there was no one who could hold him.

When I knew him, Freddie was about 23 years of age. He had drifted into the Village some six months before. His sole possessions in this world were his boyish face, a ukulele and a voice similar to no other I have ever heard.

It was a strange sort of a voice. When he strummed his ukulele and sang softly, it was a kind of childish yodel that one might find in a Gus Edwards' act. But give him enough drinks and his voice would grow heavy. He would throw his ukulele on a table and sing out to the world. And his song would end in a discordant note as Freddie stood with eyes staring upward and hands beating upon his breast.

The boy was a bum. I often suspected that he was on the hop—but I was never certain. If he was, that was his business. I never asked him.

He had come from California. That much he admitted. But beyond that, he admitted very little. He had played in vaudeville around the country and was forever attempting to break into an act in New York. He never made the grade, however—for when bookings were arranged for him, he failed to show up.

He billed himself as "Strolling Freddie" and sang in any dive that would admit him. Patrons tossed him coins and he would live on these. The Village gals, too, took quite a fancy to him and he never lacked for food.

Aside from women and liquor, then, Freddie had but one hobby. He could not play a piano—yet he loved to strike chords upon one. Never when a place was crowded. Always when he was almost alone.

I still have a mental picture of Freddie at two o'clock in the morning—just as the Red Head was being closed for the night. He would appear in the door, ukulele in hand and his eyes pleading.

"Please," he would cry, "can I play? Just for ten minutes. No more. Honestly."

Sometimes they would permit him to play. More often they would throw him out. When they allowed him to play, they did it only for the laughs.

Freddie would stroll back to the piano. He would switch on the dim light. And there, sitting in semi-darkness, he would strike the weirdest chords I have ever heard. Sometimes soft. Sometimes harsh. Sometimes uncanny and chilling. And sometimes beautifully melodious.

As he sat there, his strange soul pouring forth in those eerie chords, the boys would stand in the rear and chuckle.

"Look at that dope," they would cry. "He calls that playing. Full of hop, all right. Funny isn't he?"

But somehow or other, I could never laugh. . . .

* * *

Suddenly, after some eight months of this life in the Village, Freddie appeared in the Red Head one warm afternoon. He wore a hiker's outfit. On his back was a knapsack.

Under his left arm, where he always carried it, was his ukulele.

I looked up at him. And noticed that his eyes were strangely brilliant.

"Going away, Freddie?" I asked.

He nodded and drew me aside. Fishing into his pocket, he drew forth a letter.

"You're the only guy around here that understands me at all, Mark," he murmured. "I'm going away today. I want you to read this letter just to show you that I could be something better if I wanted to."

The letter was postmarked San Francisco. It was from his mother.

I read it hastily as he stepped back and watched me. It was nothing more than the letter of a mother to her boy who has strayed. Nothing new about it. Yet it will never grow old.

"Father has purchased that paper," was the way it read, "and he will be happy to give you work. Won't you come back to us, Freddie? We don't know what you're doing. We so seldom hear from you. You're so far away.

"Please, Freddie, come back to us. Everything is waiting for you. Father isn't angry any more. He'll be happy to see you again.. Please, Freddie. Please."

And so it read—on and on for pages and pages. I handed it back to him.

"Going back, Freddie?" I asked.

He nodded. His eyes were very brilliant now.

"Today," he responded. "Right now. Leaving this lousy town to you and the other people who belong here.

"You see, Mark, I've been a bum by choice and not by birth. I had everything a kid could ask for out on the coast, but it wasn't enough for me. I skipped from home when I was fourteen and I've been away most of the time."

I looked into the boy's eyes. It was the first time he had ever opened up to me—or anyone else in the Village, for that matter. If only his eyes hadn't been so brilliant—

"I want to be decent. But there's something inside of me that makes me feel so strange. I get those uncontrollable fits of temper and I don't know what I'm doing. I want to be an actor—a singer—a great painter. I want to be so many things. But I seem to be getting nowhere.

"So I'm going back home to start again. Maybe it'll work out. Maybe it won't. But it's worth a try. Isn't it?"

I clasped his hand.

"Sure, it is kid," I responded warmly. "But how are you going to get back? How will you live?"

He smiled and tapped his ukulele.

"I'm hiking it back with this as my pal," he cried. "I'm sleeping under the stars and I'm singing and playing for my meals. I'll get there, never fear.

"I'm gonna straighten out as soon as I get to Frisco. If

I make that town, I'll be okay. Wish me luck, old kid. I'll see you sometime again."

We shook hands once more. Warmly. Heartily. He turned his back, stepped through the door and vanished. . . .

* * *

A short while ago, a gentleman presented his card at my office. I glanced at it and had him admitted at once. It was Mr. Carl Winston, brother of the Edward Winston who once owned the Red Head in the Village.

Carl had just returned from California. He had been out there several years. He sat down with me and we chatted.

As we smilingly discussed old times, I suddenly thought again of Freddie Jacks.

"Carl," I cried, " you remember Freddie Jacks?"

Mr. Winston nodded.

"Well," I asked, " whatever became of him? Did you meet him on the coast? Has he straightened out?"

Mr. Winston looked at me in amazement.

"Surely you heard about him?" he cried. " You didn't? Why, I thought all the boys knew about it.

"He was hiking back to Frisco and he was only about fifty miles from that city. Guess he must have drunk too much because he got into a barroom fight with a Mexican. From all accounts, he flew into one of his rages, grabbed his ukulele, said he wouldn't need it any more and broke it over the Mexican's head.

"Freddie must have jumped on his head after hitting him because the Mex died the next day. Five months later they hung him for murder in San Francisco.

"Sure, Freddie's dead as hell. Well, he always was a funny guy, anyhow." . . .

* * *

Yes. He always was a funny guy anyhow. . . .

XLIX.

CHARACTERS OF BROADWAY

THE characters of Broadway. I'd like to explain them to you. Not all, because that would take 10,000 such volumes. Just a few. A few whom I have met. A few whom I have talked with. A few out of the very, very many.

Consider Constance. She doesn't like me at all. She needn't worry about that because she has plenty of company.

Shortly after her marriage to a youthful millionaire, Constance announced that she had quit the stage forever. A short time later, there were reports to the effect that things were not going so well with her and her husband. After much difficulty, Constance consented to see me about the story.

"Miss——" I began.

"Mrs., if you please," she snapped.

Time moved on. So did Constance's husband. She went to Europe and divorced her husband. Then she returned to America and announced that she was going to do a great deal of screen work in the future.

The reporters met her at the dock.

"Mrs——," said one of them. She stopped him swiftly.

"Miss, if you please," she snapped. . . .

* * *

Consider John. A Greek. He is tall and thin and wiry. He has two black eyes that burn like fire. If you dolled him up in the proper apparel, he would be mistaken for a motion picture star. He is as strong as a Strangler Lewis.

This man has a funny job. Not funny in the usual sense.

He takes care of the men's washroom in a local night club. Until three, four, sometimes five o'clock in the morning, he stands in his little cell and waits for customers.

The club is stuffy. The atmosphere is appalling. The smoke is thick. But John doesn't seem to mind. He earns a living. And he seems to be happy.

For this man has a hobby that keeps him fit. As a member of the Greek-American A. C., he is recognized as one of the greatest long-distance walking racers in the world. A walk from New York to Coney Island is just a little exercise to him.

So John stands in the smoke and watches others go the pace that kills. Any doctor will tell you that he is breathing air that would ruin any man. But John doesn't listen to doctors.

He has a dream that will undoubtedly come true in a short time. He will represent this country in the Olympic games when the time rolls around. . . .

* * *

Consider George. An elevator operator in a Broadway apartment house in which I lived. An eccentric dresser, he was quite the funniest looking individual I ever saw.

He was a very small man. Slightly less than five feet tall, I should say. He had a mop of bushy hair. Long sideboards ran down his face. His eyes were crossed. He rarely spoke.

Once there was a party in my apartment. One of the girls grew a trifle stewy. I called the elevator and went to the street with her to place her in a cab. George was on the elevator. As the car was descending the girl yanked at George's sideboards. He pushed her away. Roughly. The girl was furious.

"Don't you dare push me away," she hiccoughed. "You oughta be glad to have a woman touch you, you sap. Some nerve, you got."

George was finally fired. The superintendent of the apartment told me why. George's name, it seems, had appeared in the papers. A girl had killed herself because he refused to marry her. . . .

* * *

Consider Pepino. Valet and confidential man for one of the most popular bookmakers on the eastern tracks. Small and thin, he is large and hefty in the bookmaker's scheme of things. I doubt whether the man could move without his valet.

Pepino cares for his master as though the latter was a baby. He draws his bath and cooks his food. Pepino handles the man's bank account and knows every move he makes.

When the master gets involved with a damsel, Pepino is on the job to get him out of a possible jam. There is nothing that Pepino will not do for his master, the bookmaker. A more faithful servant never lived.

Every week in the year Pepino draws $100 for himself.

When business is good, his master will earn $5,000 a week for himself.

The bookmaker is in debt and hasn't a dime that he can really call his own. Pepino is worth close to $50,000 . . .

* * *

Consider Frank. A crook. He had done four years at Leavenworth for forgery. He marched into my office one afternoon and told me his story.

He almost cried about the situation. Told me that he'd do anything to earn an honest living. Said he would never be a crook again because the thought of jail once more was too horrible. Pleaded for a chance of some kind.

I felt sorry for him. He wasn't attempting to hide anything and was very frank in his statements. I agreed to help him. I called several people and finally landed a job for him on a trial basis. He was to report the following morning. When he arose, his eyes were shining.

"Mr. Hellinger," he said, "as long as I live I will never forget this thing you've done for me. I'll work hard and make good. You'll see. A million thanks to you for giving me this chance."

He shook my hand firmly and walked from my office. I felt happy. I had done something for another human.

The next morning I wasn't so happy. Frank failed to show up for the job. I never saw him again. . . .

* * *

Consider Nick The Greek. There are a number of men who bear that nickname. Several of them are gamblers. But the original Nick the Greek is the greatest plunger the gambling world has ever known.

Tall and handsome, he has wavy black hair that would shame many a movie star. He has been known to lose $100,000 on the turn of a card without the turn of a hair. A record of his gambling activities would make the late Arnold Rothstein look like a piker. Asked for a story about himself some years back, he refused on the ground that he was too insignificant.

He visited New York about five years ago and registered at an uptown hotel. This hotel catered to its guests and had a little plate of fruit placed in all rooms during the afternoons. The fruit usually consisted of a banana, an orange, an apple and a pear.

Nick the Greek had half a million dollars before he left the hotel that night. He visited a floating crap game and was there for twelve hours. When he emerged he had dropped $300,000 of that half a million. Yet he displayed no emotion. He took his losses as calmly as though he had just gone into a store to buy a collar.

When he arrived at his hotel and entered his room, however, he flew into a rage. He called the manager and threatened to leave immediately.

It seems that the maid had neglected to place an orange on his fruit plate. . . .

* * *

Consider Blind Frank. A colored man who operates in Harlem. He is really blind and earns plenty of money for himself by begging. With his request for alms goes a spiel that is a thing of art. He hands you a small plate upon which is a quarter. And he talks to you.

"Trustin' is de greates' thing in life," he murmurs solemnly. "De good Lord tells everybody to trust his neighbor.

"Ah'm blind and Ah've always trusted in de Lord. Dat makes me happy. An' Ah hopes dat you will trust me sufficient to place a little change on this heah plate. Remember, mah friend, that trustin' is de biggest thing in life."

People generally toss coins on the plate that holds the quarter. They do not know, of course, that the quarter is stuck to the plate with a bit of chewing gum because Blind Frank doesn't trust them. . . .

* * *

Consider Major Martin. His title of major was probably a phoney. Yet there can be little doubt that he had traveled extensively. He was forever recounting his experiences in Siam or India or some other far off place.

The major prided himself on being a soldier of fortune. When I first met him, he was doing inside work on a newspaper. But only temporarily, if you please. A man of perhaps fifty, he had grown paunchy and terrifically reminiscent. Yet he had definite ideas.

"This town of New York," he would exclaim, "is no place for a man like me. It is a sad state of affairs when a man such as I must breathe the foul air in this city.

"I've been in the middle of savage uprisings in Africa and I've hunted wild game in India. I've been around the world time and again. I've served in five wars in different parts of the universe. And now look at me.

"But I won't stay here. You can bank on that. I'll be off again one of these days for some foreign port. I don't know how much time I have left in life. But when I die it will be somewhere in the open in the midst of adventure. That's the way I want to go."

They buried Major Martin a short while ago. He had gone home drunk one night, it seems, and the gas had blown out while he was sleeping. He had died in bed in his dingy flat in Brooklyn. . . .

* * *

Consider Marjorie. One of the first of the silent picture stars. She was a famous figure in the days when Pearl White was just about to lose her honor in every reel.

Marjorie played very girlish parts. She was kittenish and coy and clinging. The company that employed her felt certain that she would last longer than Mary Pickford in public popularity. They were wrong. Marjorie passed from the picture business about thirteen years ago and hasn't had a part since.

I met Marjorie but once. That once, however, was on a return voyage from France a few years back. And I had plenty of opportunity to study her.

The woman was a study. A great study. She was then about forty-five. Her days of success were all behind her. Yet she thought she was still the great star and still the same little girl. There are many performers like that. Too many.

The first two days of the trip I saw little of her. She was busy with the big names on the boat. A noted doctor. A famous pianist. A wealthy Congressman from Massachusetts. A millionaire patent medicine man.

She strolled the deck with all of these—and more. She seldom gave me more than a passing nod. Not that it worried me. I was having the time of my life. But I did sense a story in this aging woman who was trying to be sixteen. And I would have liked to talk to her.

As the boat plunged on, she changed her company. She was now strolling with the lesser lights on the ship. People began to whisper about her. They said she was on the make—but that the men were merely laughing at her. Most of the women had laughed much earlier. They knew.

On the very last day, as the boat was nearing New York and they were preparing to close the bar, Marjorie joined my party. She talked rapidly of the screen roles she had played and asked me if I liked her gown. She looked silly in it. It was so short you might have mistaken it for a necklace.

She leaned back in her chair.

"I'm going right out to California," she murmured. "I think that I'll return to the screen. They have a starring contract for me in Hollywood."

I looked at her without a smile. Her eyes dropped. She knew that I knew. Then she placed a hand on my arm.

"Listen," she said softly. "I hate to ask you, but I must. I expect a man to meet me at the dock. If he isn't there, will you lend me $10 until I see you again?" . . . .

* * *

Consider Frank. A waiter in Greenwich Village. I never knew his last name. I doubt whether anyone in the cafe knew that, including the boss.

Frank was a highly unusual waiter. Everybody recognized that fact. He spoke five languages and was in every respect the perfect gentleman. Waiting was very obviously not his station in life. Yet there he was.

I once asked him about it. He shrugged his shoulders.

"O, it's not so bad," he returned. "There are many worse things than this—and I've done them, too. What I did before and who I was can make no possible difference to anyone.

"It's the same old story told in the same old way. Drink knocked me over. I was on a bat for years—more years than I like to admit. I saw those old men with the long, white whiskers dancing all over my bed, and many's the time millions of red goats followed me around.

"But I'm straightened out now. Haven't had a drink for almost a year. It will be a year next week. And I'll never touch another drop as long as I live. I can't stand the smell of the stuff any more.

"I've put a little money aside. Maybe I'll have a little place of my own next year. Then I'll tell you the whole story and maybe you can help me."

I didn't return to that cafe for several weeks. When I did, Frank was gone. I asked the boss what had happened. The boss shrugged his shoulders.

"I had to fire him," he announced. "He walked in here helplessly drunk for two nights in a row. I bounced him."

"But," I objected. "I thought he was on the wagon. I thought he told me he hadn't touched a drop in a year?"

The boss nodded.

"He hadn't," he replied. "And he was a very good waiter. When the year on the wagon was up, however, I urged him to have one little drink to celebrate. He did." . . . .

* * *

Consider Ida. A very dear old lady who enacted a small role in Mae West's "Diamond Lil." It was the press agent who arranged for my interview with Ida. He said she was 82 years of age and had been on the stage the greater part of her life. I sensed a good yarn— and I interviewed the woman.

That interview did make an interesting story. For her age, Ida was the keenest woman you can imagine. Her memory was marvelous. She rattled off incidents with the speed of a Floyd Gibbons. And she gave me a great sob ending for my story.

"More than sixty years ago," she murmured, "I started on the stage in the back line. I worked hard. I struggled. I studied.

"I dreamed of being a great artiste. I took lessons in voice culture and lessons in ballet dancing. I played in productions for next to nothing in order to be near the great stars of the day. I sacrificed many fine things in life so that I might achieve my great ambition. To be a great star of the stage!

"All these years have gone by. I'm still on the stage. But what has it all brought me? I'm still playing minor parts. I'm still in the back line."

That yarn was a cinch to place on paper. I described this 82-year-old woman and then went back to her girlhood days. I viewed, through her eyes, the changes that had taken place. The article fairly wrote itself.

In due time, the story appeared in print. Shortly after, I again had occasion to go backstage during a performance of "Diamond Lil." And there I met Ida again.

If I had expected her to rush over and thank me for the publicity, I was doomed to sudden disappointment. She shook my hand very coolly.

"I suppose I should thank you for your story," she said rather abruptly.

I looked at her. I was frankly puzzled.

"You don't seem very happy about it," I returned. "Was anything wrong?"

She nodded excitedly.

"I should say there was," was her amazing response. "You said I was 82 years old. As a matter of fact, I'm only 80!" . . . .

* * *

Consider Harry. A dead ringer for the late Valentino. An excellent dancer who was the talk of the town about six years ago. Harry had so many engagements in those days that he couldn't possibly fill them all. At one time, indeed, he played six spots in one day, in various parts of New York and Brooklyn.

The man did so much work that he was worth a story. I gave him one—and made it as glowing as possibe. It was a real tribute to a boy who was knocking the town dead with his rapid-fire dancing.

When I met him on the night the story appeared, he was reading it in a night club. When he was finished, he looked up at me.

"What's the matter?" he grunted. "Couldn't you find room for a picture?" . . . .

* * *

Consider Lillian. A female motion picture star with a bass voice. I met her first at a Hollywood party. She was introduced to me—and she was very nasty. Perhaps it was because she was drunk. And she was plenty drunk.

"Don't you like me?" I asked her bluntly.

She shook her head vehemently.

"Why?" I persisted, "have I ever harmed you?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"All you guys are rats," was her explanation. "I don't like you on general principles. I don't like anybody in your business. I don't like anything about you. Do you get it?"

I nodded. To sock a movie star in the jaw might be good publicity for some folks, but I can't see it that way. I merely moved away. But I am willing to admit right here that, in several stories from the Coast, I took plenty of raps at Lillian. I felt that she had given me cause.

I met her again some months later. This time in a New York restaurant. We were introduced all over again. And this time she was painfully sober. After a while, she leaned toward me.

"You don't like me, do you?" she inquired bluntly.

I shook my head.

"Why?" she persisted. "Have I ever harmed you?" . . . .

* * *

Consider Jack. A racketeer, a gambler and a bad guy with a gun. The man is plenty tough. He fears no man. He fears no woman either, which is most unusual.

Whenever I see him I make it a point to talk with him. His speech is clipped. His tongue is sharp. He does not boast of his toughness. He doesn't have to. His reputation is too well known.

At a recent opening night I chatted with him during intermission. It was raining outside so we stood in the lobby. He dug his hand in his pocket and drew it out in annoyance.

"Hell," he muttered, "I forgot my cigarettes."

I offered him one of mine. He shook his head.

"Can't smoke those things," he stated. "Can't smoke anything but my own brand."

I looked out into the street.

"There's a cigar store right across the way," I observed. "We can hop over in a jiffy."

"Not me," murmured the fearless one. "It's raining like the devil and I haven't got my rubbers on!" . . . .

* * *

Breitbart. The strong man. A great favorite over here about eight years ago. He came from Poland, I think, and there was never anyone quite like him in the vaudeville game. He had many imitators—but none of them could perform the prodigious feats of strength that Breitbart displayed twice a day.

Before coming to Broadway he broke in his act in a Brooklyn theatre. I saw him work during his opening matinee. And I will never forget the kick he handed me that Monday afternoon.

For him to drive nails through planks with his bare hands was nothing at all. Bending steel and iron bars into various shapes was hardly exercise for Breitbart. Holding a miniature carousel upon his chest and allowing six men to ride upon it failed to make him draw an extra breath.

Then, at the conclusion of his act, came a feat that made the audience cheer. A bed of nails was brought out and Breitbart would lie over it with his bare back perhaps an inch above the nails. A board was placed over his chest and a huge truck horse was made to stand upon the board. Thus Breitbart would support the horse on his raised chest, without permitting his back to touch the nails so close to his flesh. Just a nice easy way of making a living.

Yes, my friends. This Breibart was an amazing individual. He played here on several occasions. I never tried to insult him, because I had not the slightest curiosity as to what might happen if I did.

After laughing at horses and nails and iron bars for a couple of years, Breitbart went back to his native Poland for a visit. He never came back to America again, for the very simple reason that he died on the other side.

His death was an ironic one. He scratched his finger on a rusty nail and died of blood poisoning. . . .

* * *

Consider Mildred. One of the few damsels who has made a good living out of night clubs. Not as an entertainer. Nor as a hostess. She's the kind of a girlie who strolls from table to table and annoys you into buying something for the lady at your side.

In case you think this is not a highly specialized racket, you have another think coming. It takes a long time to learn how to annoy people properly. I practised for years before I learned to do it.

At any rate, I enjoy watching Mildred as she saunters from table to table. It's amusing to watch a man shake his head as the girl tries to make a sale—and finally see him buy in the end. It may not be much of a laugh on paper. But in the deadly boredom of many night clubs it's a welcome relief.

I once had occasion to write a story about Mildred. The yarn concerned a well-known literary figure who escorted a girl to a very big opening. People gaped at the couple and wondered what society girl this was.

"What nobody learned," the story wound up, "was that the 'society girl' was none other than Mildred, the cigarette girl at the Guinan Club."

The story appeared—and I saw Mildred the same night at the club. She glared at me.

"Don't you ever talk to me again," she snapped. "And keep my name out of your supposed-to-be funny stories, will you?"

I was sorry for that crack because I really liked the girl. So I attempted to straighten it out.

"I didn't mean any harm by that story," I explained. "It was simply that every one thought you were high society when you were really a cigarette girl."

Mildred clenched her fists.

"That's just it," she howled angrily. "You've got your facts all wrong. Everybody knows I'm not the cigarette girl around here. I sell nuts!" . . . .

* * *

Consider Stepin. A colored comedian who was a riot in a few pictures. He hasn't done so well lately. Success traveled to his head at a rapid clip. Before he knew what had happened, he was being married right and left—and being sued by a few others at the same time.

The colored boy is very naive. As witness the time in Hollywood when a white actor spoke to him between scenes.

"Stepin," observed the white man, "you're getting stout."

The comedian nodded.

"Ah knows dat," he responded, "an' ah doan't knows whut to do about it."

"Well," said the actor helpfully, "why don't you go on that 18-day diet?"

The colored man shook his head scornfully.

"Whut should ah do dat fo'? " he returned. "Ain't nuthin' on dere dat I like" . . . . .

* * *

Consider Max. He sat beside me during my first days in the newspaper game. I respected him as a big star because he was getting $22 a week whereas I could command but $16. He could talk by the hour. And he had definite views on life. Slightly bolshevik—but definite.

"I will be a writer," he would growl, "but I will never fool around with this Broadway mess. I do it now only as a means to earn a living. I hate it actually."

His coal black eyes would shine.

"I will write something worthwhile," he would continue. "And before many years have passed, too. I will go to Europe and settle down. And there I will write. You'll see.

"The things I write will be appreciated by the intelligensia. None of this assinine Broadway chatter for me. I will write for real men and real women. Remember my words. You will see."

Max kept part of his word. He went to Europe and he's still writing there. But his work is slightly different from what I anticipated. He does a syndicated column of bedtime stories for the kiddies. . . . .

* * *

Consider Lora. A beautiful woman—and a strange one. They said she would be featured in a show last season after having been away from Broadway for several years. The plan didn't materialize.

Lora had a peculiar complex. She had a diamond ring, if I remember correctly, that she always carried with her. At some time during the night she would claim that the diamond had dropped from the ring. Much excitement developed until the diamond was found.

The beautiful lady dropped her diamond in the wrong spot one night. It was in a cabaret. And when she made too much of a fuss, they brought her to court. There the diamond in question was brought out and examined by an expert.

Lora said the stone was worth $10,000. The expert said it was worth seventeen cents. . . .

* * *

Consider Leo. A ticket speculator—and probably the best in the business. I love to watch Leo work. He insults people by the hour—and they come back for more. With his trick vests and purple shirts, Leo typifies Broadway.

Leo stands behind his counter. A woman walks in. Before she has a chance to talk, Leo leans forward.

"Lady," he will cry, "before you can say a word, I can tell you just how old you are. You're thirty-six and you were born in Baltimore. Am I right?"

It is a rare day when Leo doesn't insult at least ten people. A man will come in and ask for two seats for some show. Leo will glance at him.

"What are you asking for seats for that show for?" he will growl. "You know that when I tell you the price, you're not going to take them. Why do you come in here and waste my time this way? Get out of here."

Silly way to treat a prospective customer? Certainly it is. But Leo has been in the speculation game for some thirty odd years—and there aren't many on Broadway who have been as successful at it as he is.

Eccentric, yes. But he knows his humans. In all the years he has been handing out insults, nobody has ever taken a poke at him. He's too wise to play with those who look as though they might. . . .

* * *

Consider "The Kid." A fairly clever boxer in his day. Nothing really exceptional—but he knew his business in good style. Besides, he had the knack of making friends. Whenever he fought, the club was crowded. And the boys cheered him merrily.

The biggest event of his career arrived when he was matched with the champ in his class. The Kid was overmatched—but he didn't feel that way. He had too much heart. The newspapermen kept printing the fact that the bout should never have been arranged. But the tickets went at a great rate and none of the cash customers complained.

The fight took place in the old Garden and I was an interested spectator because I liked the Kid immensely. I felt that he didn't have a chance, but I was hoping against hope. Maybe—

But no. My hopes were in vain and the sports experts, by some modern miracle, were right for once. In the first round, the Kid was punched from every angle. He staggered several times and was knocked down once. He refused to take a count.

Each round was practically a repetition of the first one. He was getting a terrific lacing and many of his friends walked out rather than witness the slaughter. But the Kid refused to quit. More that that, he refused to take the count he was entitled to.

The bout went the limit—and it should have been stopped in the second round. After the fight I saw him in his dressing room. His eyes had a peculiar glassy stare.

"I would have had him in another round," he told me. "I wuz just lettin' him tire himself out." . . . .

Down in Asbury Park recently, I attended a party. The host, a well-known sporting man, mentioned the Kid during the course of conversation. I had often wondered what had become of the boy. And I asked him if he knew.

"Sure I know," was his reply. "He's in an insane asylum just outside of New York. And there's a funny story about him too. He stands on the asylum lawn all day long and shadow boxes all over the place. If anyone stops him he always says the same thing.

" 'I think I would have had him in another round,' he cries. 'I wuz just lettin' him tire himself out'." . . . .

* * *

Consider Percy. A dramatic critic and a grand guy. A very important man in his field—but never too important to give advice and counsel to those who are younger and less experienced.

I was sent out with Percy one night. He seemed glum. The cafes we visited seemingly had little appeal for him. We finally wound up in Reuben's for a bite to eat.

Percy had two of the heaviest sandwiches in the place. And when they're heavy in Reuben's, brother, they're plenty heavy. After finishing them, he topped the meal off with a large piece of lemon meringue pie. Then he sat back and sighed.

"What is it, Percy?" I inquired. "You've been blue all night. What's on your mind?"

He shook his head.

"It's my doctor," he responded. "He told me this afternoon that if I didn't watch my diet, I'd be a very sick man." . .

* * *

Consider Hymie. A small roly-poly sort of a guy. He was short and fat—and he had a face like a moon. When I first knew him he ran a speakeasy. That made him a criminal, I suppose. But somehow I never figured him as such.

He was too good-natured to be an out-and-out crook. His sense of humor was too large. He was too jovial and too big-hearted ever to be pointed out as a man who had no respect for law and order.

Hymie's speakeasy was the most prosperous in New York at the time I first met him. He was the manager and part owner of the Hotsy-Totsy club—the first joint to bring back the idea of the old saloon after prohibition. He had sawdust on the floor and heaps of free lunch on the counter. And everybody in New York came to visit Hymie's joint.

I enjoyed talking to Hymie. I picked up many a story in his place and I would sit around with Hymie for hours at a time. We would talk of this and that. His moon-like face would seldom grow serious. Life seemed to be nothing more than a gag to him.

One night, however, I caught him in an unusual mood.

"Look, Hymie," I said. "I have an idea that you're in the wrong racket."

"Yeah?" he replied. "Why?"

"Oh," I asserted, "I think you're mixing up with the wrong people. You weren't cut out for this sort of stuff. You're too good a guy in your heart. What do you suppose is going to happen to you eventually?"

"I'll tell you, Mark," was his reply, "I never worry about that sort of stuff. One guy goes on—and another guy croaks. Maybe I'll go on. And maybe I won't."

He looked at me solemnly.

"But as long as you're asking me," he went on, "I suppose I might as well tell you the answer. Some day Hymie is goin' to disappear. Fast-like. And that'll be the last you'll hear of him. See if I'm not right."

Some five years passed. Hymie was still around. I kidded him about that disappearing act several times. He laughed too. It was hard to get him in a serious mood a second time. He wasn't built that way. . . .

There was a fight in a speakeasy one night. Several shots rang out and two men hit the floor. Hymie was in the speakeasy and he was a witness. The following day he disappeared. And no one has ever seen him since.

Funny thing about Hymie. I guess he knew what he was talking about all the time. . . .

* * *

Consider Mildred. I met her but once. But the laugh she handed me was so huge that I will never forget her name.

It happened in Madison Square Garden during one of the numerous charity affairs that are forever being held there. I can't remember what brought me there, but I know I was wandering around the rear of the Garden in search of someone.

I passed a certain spot three or four times in the course of an hour and I noticed a rather attractive girl standing still and glancing at her watch. I finally walked over. Hellinger to the rescue.

"Pardon me, miss," I began. "You seem to be looking for someone."

"I am," she replied.

"Well," I persisted, "are you a stranger here?"

"Not exactly," she responded. "You see, I met a young man before and he promised to escort me home later. I've been waiting here almost an hour and he hasn't showed up."

"That's too bad," I murmured stupidly. "Have you been out in the Garden proper?"

"Oh, yes," was her amazing reply. "I came direct from there to here. You see, I won the popularity contest!" . . .

* * *

Consider Phil. A splendid comedian and an extremely likeable guy. Most comics are dizzy in one way or another. Phil is not like the rest. Not quite like them, anyhow.

I like him immensely. I preach to him and he preaches to me. We get along fine because neither of us listens to what the other is saying.

Phil's greatest fault is that he loves to gamble. In this respect, he has reformed quite a bit of late. But every once in so often the fever crops out again.

One night Phil played a small party on Park avenue. He was well paid for the engagement, which took place at the home of a millionaire broker on a Saturday. After he had finished his work and was about to depart, the millionaire strolled over to him.

"You were splendid tonight, Phil," he said, "and I would like to help you in return. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Phil thought a moment. Then he nodded.

"Yes," replied the comic, "there is. You know the market inside and out. If you can give me a little tip on a stock, why———."

The Wall Street man slapped him on the shoulder.

"My boy," he cried, "I have the very thing for you. Don't pass this around, but—— ——is taking a big jump on Monday. Buy it at the opening and you can't miss."

Phil thanked the millionaire profusely and left in high spirits. He spent the following day figuring how much cash he had on hand and seeing how much he could borrow until the stock took its leap.

On Monday morning, before the market opened, the comedian had scraped together some $12,000. He placed the entire wad on the stock on margin and retired to his home to await developments.

The developments came rapidly. The stock dropped nine points in an hour and Phil was cleaned out! . . .

* * *

Consider Pauline. Born in the South, and an arrival in New York from a small Tennessee town at the age of eighteen. Beautiful, blonde Pauline. And a woman who knew the game.

But, no matter how wise we are, we never know enough. Neither did Pauline. After trouping around for several years, and playing a number of featured engagements, the girl fell madly in love with a bird who is today one of the wittiest men on Broadway. His quips and gags are printed the world over. Pauline went for him plenty. He merely liked her.

The last time I saw her was in the office of Murray Phillips, the casting director. I was sitting with Phillips when she walked in.

"Well, Pauline," said Murray, "I've got a great stock job for you in Toledo. Will you take it?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know, Murray," she replied. "I'm feeling terribly tired. As a matter of fact, I don't think I'll take the job. And maybe I won't bother you at all anymore. I'm going home."

Pauline kept her word. She went home all right, but she went there in a wooden box. She wasn't tired. She was just too much in love. She jumped from her hotel window a few days later, and they laid her to rest in that small town in Tennessee.

The man for whom she killed herself is still telling jokes. He's a very funny fellow. . . .

* * *

Consider Mr. Jordan. I never did get his first name. I met him at a party one night and he had the floor. He held it most of the night.

Mr. Jordan was in the shoe business. Did you ever hear two newspapermen talk shop? Well Mr. Jordan was even worse, if possible. He talked about shoes for slightly more than an hour. You've met people like that, haven't you?

No matter which way the conversation went, Mr. Jordan steered it back to shoes. That was his business and he talked to the women about snakeskin shoes, buckskin shoes, alligator skin shoes and so on until I grew dizzy.

"Yes," he would say, "shoes play a most important part in good dress. Good shoes betoken the breeding of the man or the woman. That's my business and I know."

He finally arose to leave. And as he walked across the floor, his shoes squeaked! . . . .

* * *

Consider Martha. A newspaper gal. How she ever got into the game, I do not know. I met her about six years ago. Her eyes were big and wide and innocent. A tiny thing, she looked to be about fifteen years of age.

The men were always careful of the things they said in front of her. She was such a child. Such a baby. She didn't belong in a newspaper office. Or any other office, for that matter.

I sat at my desk one morning and opened my mail. Among the stuff was a book sent by an anonymous party. The title was "The Sex Life of a Moth." I glanced through it—and a glance was sufficient to make me realize that it had been sent by some perverted mug who thought he was being clever. It was as filthy a piece of literature as I have ever encountered. And I've read plenty of Broadway columns.

As I sat there, Martha passed my desk. She looked at the book.

"What's that book you have?" she inquired.

I snapped it shut. The sweet child would die if she knew what it really was.

"Nothing for you," I smiled. "It's not for little girls to see."

She leaned over and looked at the title. Then she waved her hand.

"Oh," she cried. "It's the 'Sex Life of the Moth.' You'll enjoy that. I read it several years ago." . . . .

* * *

Consider Fritz. One of the great violinists of this age—or any other age. Extremely pleasant to talk to. And responsible for one of the greatest lines I have ever heard.

A very important society matron approached Fritz at a tea one afternoon. She gave him the lorgnette business with all the pomp at her command. Which was plenty.

"They tell me, sir," she gave out, "that you play very beautifully. I would like to engage you to play at my home on Friday night a week. What would your price be?"

The musician bowed low.

"My price, madam," he responded, "would be $3,000."

The haughty damsel nodded.

"That is satisfactory," she asserted. "But you understand, of course, that you will merely be present as an artist and that you will not mingle with the guests."

Fritz bowed lower than ever.

"In that case, madam," he murmured, "my price will be only $2,000." . . . .

* * *

Consider "Feet." One of the most amusing gentlemen on the big street. As strong as an ox, I am quite certain he could whip a husky football team single-handed if you gave him a few tables and chairs to toss around. "Feet" is a powerful man.

Exactly what his business is I am not in a position to state. I have known him about ten years. And in that space of time, he has dabbled in the boxing game, the horses, the night clubs, the real estate gag, baseball, soda water, hockey and several thousand other pursuits that I have not the space to list here.

"Feet" has the reputation of being able to wriggle out of any situation. Sometimes, when he does something that doesn't seem quite right, his best pals grow extremely peeved with him. But Mr. Edson faces them with a grin and inevitably emerges triumphant. Some day he might not be so lucky—but that's neither here nor there.

They tell a story—and it's supposed to be absolutely true—about a tight spot that "Feet" was in some four years ago. He had purchased some articles, it seems, and had promised to pay at an early date. But time rolled on and "Feet" found that he had very little cash with which he cared to part. Accordingly, the obligation remained unpaid.

In accordance with the Broadway rule, "Feet" was duly warned that he must pay at once or something would happen. Such conversations are like the breath of life to our hero. He told the boys that, as long as they felt that way about it, he would never pay the bill in question. Let them do their worst.

Two nights later, as "Feet" stood on the corner of 50th street and Broadway, a man stepped close to him.

"Feet," muttered the man, "turn to your right and walk west. My gat's in your ribs right now. Walk."

"Feet" walked. Quickly.

"What's the big idea?" he inquired.

"You're gonna get the works," replied the other man. "It's on account of that bill. When we get to Tenth Avenue, I'm steering you into an alley. And that's all there is to it.

"One shot'll do the trick, 'Feet.' Take it like a man. Walk faster."

"Feet" kept walking. And as he walked, he talked. He talked long and hard and earnestly. He had to. He was in a tough spot. Here was his chance to make good his reputation for wriggling out of anything.

He made good, all right. Before they were anywhere near Tenth Avenue, "Feet" had convinced the killer that he should be let go. And before he said goodnight to the gunman, "Feet" borrowed $20 from him! . . ,

* * *

Consider Thelma. A chorus girl. A very nice chorus girl. I've known her for a long time.

Thelma broke into the papers one day. It seems that a big business man from Providence, R. I., took quite a fancy to Thelma and presented her with a $1,500 wrist watch. The chorus miss duly accepted the present as an act of Providence.

In due time the watch and the romance both failed to run smoothly. Thelma wasn't particular about the romance, but she sent the watch back to the jeweler to have it repaired. When Thelma went to reclaim the timepiece the jeweler refused to give it to our heroine. He said that the big giver from Providence had ordered him not to return it.

Was Thelma angry? Well, I ask you. She wasn't the kind of a girl who would let anybody get away with a thing like that. Not Thelma. She immediately hired a lawyer, told him all the horrible details and suggested that he get her watch back at once.

The lawyer made good. He brought his case before a magistrate who weighed the evidence in a most judicial fashion. The decision was that the jeweler was to return the watch.

Meanwhile, of course, the papers were taking due notice of the situation. Thelma's picture appeared in many of them in connection with the sad story of the Providence watch. Thus, while walking down Broadway, Thelma met an old friend.

"Hello," said the friend. "Glad to see you again. I've been reading about you in the papers. Have you got that watch with you? I'd like to see it?"

Thelma shook her pretty head.

"No," she replied sadly. "Isn't it all a shame? I couldn't pay my lawyer the proper fee. So now he has the watch!" . .

* * *

Consider Steve. One of few speakeasy proprietors in New York with an original idea. You may not admire all the things that Steve does, but you have to admire his ingenuity.

There was his idea, for instance, of the rain on the roof. Ever hear of it? Well it's a honey. Listen:

Steve was running a joint down in Park Row. He had two rooms—and the back one of the two had but one dingy window. Over the window was a tin extension. And above the extension was a water pipe that could be turned on at any time.

When a good party stumbled into the speakeasy, Steve had the water turned on full force. It rained down on the tin roof and created an infernal racket. Anybody looking out of the window would have sworn that this was one of the worst storms in years.

As a result, the party always stayed longer than it had anticipated. They were waiting, of course, for the rain to stop. And you may be sure it seldom stopped until the party was well on its way to the street.

I knew Steve for a long time and I never heard him get a squawk on the rain gag. For the party either figured that the rain had stopped—or they were too drunk to remember what had caused them to remain and buy so many additional drinks.

There's only one thing wrong with Steve. He's miscast. With his ideas he would have made a marvelous senator. . . .

* * *

Consider Harold. Former motion picture press agent and newspaperman in the Hearst service. At one stage of his career, Harold handled a young comedian who had shot to the top of the profession in a short time and — as is the usual custom—had slid to the bottom again in a manner almost as rapid.

The comedian was a likeable fellow and Harold was glad to continue working for him even when he was on the down grade and the weekly pay envelope was very infrequent. But the comic's wife was another story. A minor player in the films, she thought she was Pola Negri, Gloria Swanson and Mary Pickford rolled into one. And she acted accordingly.

She complained about the press agent. She complained about the pictures he sent out. She complained about notices. She complained so much, in fact, that Harold could stand it no longer. He took the comedian aside one morning.

"I'll have to call it a go," he asserted. "Your wife is driving me nuts. She thinks she's the queen of the movies and that I'm her royal slave. I don't know what's the matter with her.

"You know I've been working for you for nothing for some weeks and you also know that I'm doing it because I like you immensely. But the wife is something else again. She's cold, haughty and impossible to understand. I'm through."

The comedian shook hands with Harold.

"I've heard the same complaint from others," he sighed, "and I feel terrible about it. My wife's a wonderful woman but, as you say, she's very difficult to understand. At any rate, thanks."

About three months later, the press agent was seated in his office when he received a sad phone call. The comedian, who had been taken to a hospital the week before for a serious illness, had suffered a relapse. He would not live more than a few hours.

Harold felt badly. After all, he had known this comic for so long a time. If there was only a little something he might do. In a minute, his mind was made up. He reached for his phone and called the comic's wife.

"Hello," he said, "this is Harold. I just heard some very sad news. They tell me your husband can't live but a few hours more."

"I know it," was the wife's reply. "I was just told the same thing."

The press representative struggled for words.

"Well," he murmured, "I don't know that there's much I can say to you. But I want you to know one thing. If there's anything you want me to do, you have merely to command me. Do you need anything?"

The wife hesitated. Then—

"Yes," she finally asserted, "this is something you can do for me. I suppose that, when my husand dies, the papers will be using pictures. I just had some new ones made and they're beautiful. Would you mind taking them around to the papers for me?" . . .

* * *

Consider Harry. When I was pretty much of a kid, Harry was a great Broadway star. He doesn't look any older today than he did then.

It was Harry who introduced, "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows." A swell song that was. Glorious in its day. Maybe memory fails me, but it seems that I sat in the gallery at a show called "Oh, Look," and heard Harry sing that number. And, gee! what a happy night that was.

For Harry was the Rudy Vallee of his day. He'll probably feel funny when he sees this piece and there's just a chance that he'll resent it. But it's true nevertheless. Fox had that certain something in his voice. The girls stood at the stage door and pushed each other for a look at him. And maybe you'll think I didn't feel funny when I met Gertrude on the street one afternoon and she confessed that she was quite crazy about Harry.

But the years roll on and the public demands new Harrys. The day must come, too, when they'll demand a new Rudy Vallee. And Rudy, unless he has saved enough money, will do just as Harry did. He'll seek foreign fields. And he'll undoubtedly find just as much success in those fields as Harry did.

On a recent night, in a cabaret, the master of ceremonies introduced Harry. I had met Harry several times, even though I never grew to know him real well. And when Harry agreed to do a number, I wanted to cry out, "Sing, Harry! Sing that old number of yours! Sing 'I'm Always Chasing Rainbows' as you never sang it before!"

I didn't have to make my request. Harry sang his song. He sang it as well as he ever did. That song of a million memories. That song that once thrilled the heart of a nation. "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows." A beautiful number really. But those fools around me didn't know.

One woman said, "What's he singin' that old thing for?" Another woman loudly commanded a waiter to bring her ice. A man left his table and upset his chair. The cigarette girl murmured, "Camels, Lucky Strikes, Chesterfields."

Soon Harry was through. I wanted to get up and cry out to him. I wanted to shout:

"Say, Harry, that's swell. You've brought back memories tonight. You're singing better than you did fifteen years ago. I wouldn't have missed this night for the world. Thanks, Harry. Thanks very much."

But I couldn't do that. It wouldn't have been dignified. Because the applause was not very great. It was polite, really. Many of them had forgotten, I guess. Or maybe they never knew.

So, as he returned to his table, Harry nodded.

"Hello, Mark," he said.

I nodded, too.

"Hello, Harry," I said.

And the crowd got up to dance. . . .

L.

BORIS

BACK in 1913, Boris set out for America from a very small town in Russia. His story was the same as that of countless others. He was going to New York, a wonderful place where money grew on trees.

Boris was very sure of himself. A proud man—and a vain one—he had no doubt of his ultimate success. Didn't he have plenty of relatives in the city of New York — and weren't they all earning good money? Most of them were fools, he knew. And if they were successful, there was no reason to think that he wouldn't be doubly so.

He was married and was the father of two small children. His wife loved him devotedly and never did anything but yes him. So when it came time for him to leave, she agreed with every word he said.

"As soon as I am settled," he announced, "I will send for you and the children. Meanwhile, you will wait here for me in the village. I will leave you enough for at least a year. Then you will come to New York with the children and join me there."

His wife nodded. He kissed his two children. And he left Russia to exchange poverty for millions. . . .

* * *

Boris did not do badly. New York wasn't quite what he expected and he failed to find a single money tree. But several of his relatives helped establish him in a little business. And soon he was earning more money in a week than he had earned in his Russian village in two months.

He wrote frequently to his wife. His letters were master-pieces of pride. He was doing this and he had acomplished that. Soon, he said, he would be able to send enough money to bring her and the children to his side.

Suddenly the war broke out. The little village became a war center. Many of the inhabitants had been compelled to flee for their lives. Letters between Boris and his wife were now things of the past. He could not get to her. She could not get to him. They tried various methods of communication, I imagine. But they never managed to connect.

Although it was only natural that he should be extremely worried, Boris did not neglect his business. War times were good times for his business. So he kept forging ahead and accumulating as much money as he could. Our good friend, Boris, was a practical man.

Shortly after the armistice was signed, Boris received a letter from her. With trembling hands he opened the missive.

Strangely enough, the news was of the best. She had not fared badly at all, she wrote, and the children were healthy enough. She had found work in a wealthy home and had managed to support herself in comfortable fashion.

Boris was overjoyed. His children were now much older than when he had last seen them. He would be proud to have them with him. It would do his heart good to show them off to his relatives. So he wrote immediately to his wife, saying that she should ready herself and the children for the trip to America.

The man phoned his various relatives and told them the good news. He was somewhat surprised at their attitudes. For some reason they failed to share his joy. This puzzled him. But later in the day he found the solution.

The same mail that had brought him his good news had brought other letters to his relatives. One of these relatives came to see him that night.

"Boris," he said, "I have been chosen by the family to tell you something. We know what we have learned is the truth. We do not want you to be angry. And we tell you only because we think it best that you should know.

"Your wife had a third child two years ago. And this child is being brought up with your own."

Boris drove the informant from his house. He cursed him as a liar and a trouble maker. He swore he would kill him for being such a liar. He promised to have vengeance on all his relatives.

His pride had suffered a terrible blow. Could it be possible that his wife had done such a thing to him. To HIM? Well, he'd soon find out. Instead of cabling money, he sailed for Europe himself the following day. . . .

* * *

The story was true. In Russia, his wife told him the entire tale. And it was all very simple.

In the early days of the war, she and the children had been starving. A man had come along, a fairly wealthy man. He had fallen in love with her. And although she loved no one but Boris, she had done the only thing she could see under the circumstances. In order to protect her children, she had gone to live with this man. And another child had been born. The father had died shortly after.

Boris was not a thoroughly stupid man. He could see that she was telling him the complete truth and he realized that she was not entirely to blame. But what was he to do? Face his relatives in New York and admit the truth? Never. Not he. Too much vanity for that.

So he figured another plan. He would take his wife and two children back with him to America. But the other child, a boy, would stay in Russia. He would, he said, send sufficient money from time to time to support him.

Thus it happened. He returned to America. And the very first thing he did was to bring his wife and children before his relatives.

"I told you that you were lying to me," he asserted. "Here is my wife. My boy and my girl. The rumors you heard were unfounded. You can see that now, can you not?"

The relatives said they were sorry. They knew, of course, exactly what had happened. Letters from Russia had given them all the details. But they said nothing further. If Boris wanted his pride, let him have it. . . .

Boris failed to keep his word about that boy in Russia. He sent no money for his support. The poor people in whose care he had been placed wrote begging letters time after time. They said that, unless Boris sent some money, the boy would be placed in an institution. Boris did nothing. His relatives were written to also. But they did nothing either. They were wiser than to speak to Boris this time.

Some months later Boris' oldest child, the boy, was killed in an automobile accident in the Bronx. And just one week after his daughter was taken ill with pneumonia and died two days following.

In his grief Boris became superstitious. He felt this punishment had been visited upon him because of what he had done to that boy in Russia. So, four days after his daughter was buried, he sent for the boy.

That boy is now with Boris and his mother. He is about fourteen years of age and Boris treats him as his own son. Boris told his relatives that neither he nor his wife had ever seen the boy before and that they merely adopted him from an asylum.

The relatives know the truth. And Boris knows they know. But he's a proud man. . . .

LI.

EXPLANATION

THERE are two types of gentlemen in this world that I enjoy meeting. One is the fellow who says that, no matter how much he drinks, he can never get drunk. The other is the bird who will smile contentedly and tell you that he understands women. Both types are easily analyzed. The first is inexperienced. The second is a consummate liar.

Blinky belonged to the second class. A member of the underworld in good standing, what he stole and how he cheated need not concern us here. Sufficient to relate that he always had plenty of money.

As far back as Blinky's friends could remember, he had been quite a devil with the ladies. He was seldom seen with the same woman twice. That was against his code.

"What's the use of chasing around with one skirt?" he would argue. "What does it get you? Marriage. Yes, sir—marriage and babies. And then where are you?

"That kind of stuff is not for Blinky. No guy has to fall in love unless he wants to. And I don't want to. What's more I ain't going to. If I watch my step, I'll be okay. Because I understand women."

That last crack explained Blinky thoroughly. I don't have to tell you much more about him. He understood women. . .

* * *

In due time, Blinky met Dorothy. Dorothy had been in several comedies on Broadway and knew every onion in the bag. Blinky took her out one night and gave her a few of the lines that always caused the ladies to fall for him. Dorothy failed to fall. She laughed at him.

So Blinky took her out a second time. And a third, and a fifth, and a tenth. Still, whenever he made advances, she gave him nothing but a good-natured grin.

"I'll tell you how it is, Blinky," she said. "I like you, but I'm not in love with you by several million miles.

"If you want to be a friend of mine, that's fine. But don't get any false notions. Because I don't feel that way about you. And that's all there is to it, my friend."

Meanwhile Blinky's friends were having the time of their lives with him.

"Thought you were the fellow who understands women," they laughed. "What's the matter with Dorothy? Isn't she a woman?

"And what's that you said about never falling in love? Ho, ho! If you aren't in love now, you'll do until a guy in love comes along."

Blinky shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, what of it?" he replied. "Suppose I have gone a little bit screwy about Dot? Can't it happen to a fellow without you guys poking your noses into his business?

"But all this don't make no difference. Let me tell you something, smart guys. I'm going to get that dame—and I'm going to get her right.

"Remember what I'm telling you, boys. Dorothy is as good as mine right now. Because I understand women." .. .

Before another two weeks had passed, Blinky had asked Dorothy to become his wife. For the first time in his life he had fallen completely in love with a woman. He knew the mob would go into hysterics if he was hauled into the marriage net. But he had passed the stage when he worried about that. All he wanted was this girl.

Dorothy turned him down.

"That's the first proposal I've had in a long time," she said, "and when I say proposal, I mean marriage. But what I told you before, Blinky, still goes. I don't love you enough And I've got to say no."

When he reached his home that night Blinky was desperate. He sat in a chair, opened a bottle of brandy and began to think. When dawn came he was cock-eyed. But he was still thinking. . . . .

Two days later, Blinky came to Dorothy's apartment. He was shivering. He looked beaten. He was a different Blinky. He flung himself at the girl's feet.

"Sweetheart, he cried, "you're the only one I can turn to. They're after me—but I can't leave town because of you. I've just killed a man. And it's only a question of time until the coppers nab me.

"I didn't know what I was doing, Dot. I lost my head. I wanted a lot of money to buy you things because I love you. And I croaked a guy. I won't go away, honey, because I love you. My God, darling, what am I going to do?"

Dorothy was the average woman. A bit shrewder, perhaps, but still the average woman. She looked at this man in torment—and then she drew him to her.

"Don't worry, Blinky," she murmured. "I'll help you. Forget it if you can. I'll help you. The cops will never nail you. Because you're going to stay right here—with me."

It's a good thing Dorothy couldn't see Blinky's face as she held him close. Because he was grinning. . . .

About seven months drifted by. Blinky was the same man. A trifle more conceited, as his pals noticed when he slipped off to see them. But otherwise the same Blinky. It was Dorothy who had changed.

She had grown thinner. She was extremely nervous. She jumped at the slightest noise. And one night she told Blinky the reason.

"It's all because of you," she said. "I'm always afraid that the cops will nab you—and it's the terrible uncertainty of the thing that's driving me crazy. If only something would happen. If I only knew definitely that you would be caught —or that you'd never be caught. Then I'd be satisfied."

Blinky thought it over. He still loved Dorothy with all his heart. More, if possible, than he had loved her before she permitted him to live in her home. He knew now that she loved him too. And he decided not to let her suffer any longer.

The following afternoon, he sat himself on the arm of her chair.

"Honey," he cried, "I've made up my mind to make you feel better. I'm going to tell you something.

"When I told you about killing a man, I was lying. I didn't kill anybody at all. But I wanted you terribly. And knowing all about women, I knew that you would be sorry for me. I told you that story. And I was right."

Dorothy's next move was a great surprise to Blinky. She stood up, her eyes ablaze.

"You dirty two-timing rat!" she screamed. "So you lied to me, did you? And you've made me worry for seven months, have you? Get out of here, you bum. Get out and stay out!"

Blinky tried to argue. Dorothy began to throw things. Blinky ran . . .

* * *

To his pals, Blinky has been attempting to explain ever since.

"All I wanted to do," he asserts, "was to make her feel better. I did it—and look what happened. I understand women all right. But she's different." . . . .

LII.

REFORMATION

JOE was doing three years on a forgery rap. The prison was one that isn't so very far from the good old city of New York. And the warden was a great character. Yes, sir. Warden Smith was ruler of a domain of characters. But few of the subjects were as unusual as the king, himself.

First of all, the warden had very definite theories about convicts. With ninety-nine out of a hundred he was just about the toughest egg that ever lived. But with the one lucky guy he was as soft-hearted as the mother in a mammy picture. In other words, he had his favorites.

Joe became a favorite. I don't know how he happened to be so fortunate. I know merely that he was. After he had been in the jail but two weeks or so, Warden Smith summoned him to his office and asked him a few questions. Joe answered them as best he could and went back to his cell.

That night the crook in the next cell put Joe wise.

"Buddy," he chirped, "when Smith sends for you like he did today, that's the best sign in the world. If he gets to like you, you're liable to turn out to be the warden instead of him.

"He's the funniest guy you're ever gonna meet. The boys don't like him because he acts like a louse when he don't have to.

"Once in a while, he picks out some guy and goes the limit for him. He talks a lot about givin' a man a fightin' chance and all that kind of hooey. But he ain't kiddin' me none. He only does it to ease his conscience.

"It's been a long time since the punk has had a pet, and he's just about due. Maybe you'll be the next one. You'd better have a good story ready in case it happens. And I wish you luck. You'll be outa here before you know it."

Joe nodded. He needed no further advice. . . .

Two days later the warden sent for Joe again. The forger walked into the office.

"Sit down," said Smith cordially.

Joe sat. The warden coughed.

"Young man," he began. "I am a most unusual person to be in charge of a prison. I have faith in humanity. I believe entirely in the principles of environment. I feel that, even though a man has committed a wrong act, he should have a fighting chance to better himself when his prison term is over."

Joe nodded.

"That's a grand thing for you to say, warden," he murmured, "but I'm not surprised. Even before you were kind enough to speak to me I knew just the kind of a man you were. You understand the criminal. And you are just in your judgment."

Smith beamed.

"I'm glad you talk that way," he cried. "It shows you have understanding. I've been looking up your record and I see that this is your first offense. What made you do it?"

Joe did a very naughty thing. He failed to open up and tell the nice gentleman that he had been in seven jails around the country under assumed names and for different offenses. Instead he hung his head and gave a picture of shame that Barrymore might have envied.

"It was because of my mother," he said.

"Ah," cried the warden. "Your mother."

"Yes," lied Joe brilliantly. "I don't want to sound like a sob sister, warden, but I'm going to give you the truth.

Mother was out in Denver. A T.B. sufferer, she needed money for doctors and things. And it was up to me to get that money.

"I drifted East. Work was hard to find. I did the best I could—but the best wasn't enough. I fell in with a pretty tough gang. And before I realized what I was doing I had forged the check that they finally nailed me on."

The forger bit his lip. He leaned forward. There was a catch in his voice.

"Even before I was given this bit, warden, I had my punishment. The stolen money never did mother any good. She died before she ever received it. That was my punishment, sir. And it was a severe one."

Smith shook his head. He blew his nose.

"Young man," he asserted, "I'm going to help you. From now on I'm going to see that life gives you a better break. I understand men and I know that you have the makings of a real man. I am going to be your friend. You may go now."

The prisoner murmured his thanks and stepped through the door. Outside, he smiled to himself.

"The phoney bum," he muttered. "He's a sucker for mammy stories. I wonder where my old lady is, at that? . . . .

* * *

From that moment on everything was jake for Joe. As the warden's protege, the forger led the life of a flock of Rileys. Every possible time was removed from his sentence. And it wasn't quite two years before Joe was shaking the warden's hand in a warm goodby.

"With your permission, sir," said Joe, "I'm coming in to see you very often. I want you to know that you've been the greatest help I have ever had in all my life. Because of you, I will never do another wrong thing."

And Joe left. . . . . .

The ex-convict kept his word. He got himself a job as a city salesman for a large meat concern. And whenever it was possible he made it a point to jump into his flivver and motor out to see the warden.

This went on for about seven months. Joe sat with the warden in the latter's office one Saturday afternoon. And Joe was talking.

"You're a remarkable man, Mr. Smith," he chirped. "I can't tell you how I feel about you. I often wonder why you singled me out from among all those convicts and gave me a chance to make good?"

The warden slapped his old prisoner on the back.

"It's because I knew you had it in you," he returned. "And it's because I understand men as few other people can."

A few more words and Joe arose to leave. As he neared the door, he suddenly yanked a check from his pocket.

"Oh, Lord," he murmured. "I have a check here for $240 on my firm, and I forgot to have it cashed. And it's a Saturday afternoon, too. I——"

"Don't say another word, Joe," interrupted the warden. "Give me that check and I'll cash it for you. Cashing checks for a man who once did a forgery bit isn't a very good policy. But it only goes to prove how greatly I trust you."

"Thank you, sir," said Joe. "You're swell to me."

The warden cashed the check. Two days later, it bounced back in beautiful fashion. . . . .

* * *

The story might end right there. As a matter of fact, though, it didn't. The warden paid the bad check loss out of his own pocket and never told a soul about it. He simply couldn't.

A short time ago Joe was picked up on a burglary charge and given eight years in the same prison. Warden Smith is still the head man. And don't ask me to tell you what's happening to Joe right now. I'm on the verge of tears as it is. . . . .

LIII.

THE LADY WHO KEPT HER WORD

OUR story opens some twenty-three years ago in a town called New York. Twenty-three years ago — when George M. Cohan was toasting a Broadway that has changed mightily in the interim. When Gloria Swanson wasn't even a shop girl as yet. When Harry K. Thaw was spending his second million to keep out of jail. And when Greta Garbo was just about as friendly with newspaper men as she is today.

But enough of that. Ruth was the girl's name. Pretty girl. Too pretty, maybe, for her own good. Born on a farm in the West, she had come to New York when the last of her folks went still further west. Nineteen years of age, she landed a job with a large manufacturing house. And there she was.

Doubtless, as most girls do, she dreamed of the big, handsome man who'd come riding into her life some day. Well, it wasn't long before he arrived. Only he didn't come riding into her life. He merely walked into it.

He was one of the partners in the concern and had just returned from a European trip that had lasted six months. Ruth took one peek at him and fell like a suicide from the Woolworth Tower. Here he was with looks, power, money, polish and even a wife. This latter point, however, was not one of his boasts. He'd much rather you didn't mention it.

Ruth was a decidedly decent kid and had no right to go for such a bird as this. But how was she to know? Every time she looked at him, her heart beat wildly, and the hissing of the radiator sounded like the songs of the little birdies in the Springtime.

This was the ideal time for her to beat it back to the farm, but she didn't know that either. Nothing mattered as long as she could be near him. And when he finally made a play for her she just crumpled in like the Princeton line. This, I guess, was love.

They grew to know each other quite well. He took her places and showed her the town. He bought her pretty little things. And then he finally sold her on the proposition of a cute little apartment where they could talk by themselves. Anything he said was all right with her. She thought of nothing but her present happiness with her man. Which is always swell—until the crash comes.

There was but one flaw. The marriage bug. He had told Ruth that he was divorced. But whenever she spoke to him about a possible union, he hurried to speak about the weather and how built-up Broadway was getting to be these days. She seldom persisted. But when she did, he'd merely kiss her fervently and tell her not to worry herself about such trifles.

One afternoon came the detour on happiness highway. He took her in his arms and she broke the news. She had seen a doctor. There was going to be a baby.

Ruth's handsome hero was as happy to receive that news as if he had just been bitten by a crew of rattlesnakes. He coughed. He stammered. He seemed highly nervous. And finally he laughed.

"Nothing to worry about, my dear," he asserted. "Nothing at all, really. I'll have to think this over by myself and we'll see what can be done. I'll leave you now and call you later. Don't worry. See you by and by."

What he really meant was bye-bye. Time went by and he failed to show up. The kid called his office and was told that he was out of town. The days turned into weeks and Ruth was fairly frantic with fear. What to do now?

One morning he returned to her. He admitted that he had been something very close to a rat—but said that he had been afraid to face the facts. Now he would tell everything. . . .

The facts were tougher than a twenty cent steak. He had lied when he told Ruth he was divorced. He was still married. He and his wife had never been happy but they had lived together for the sake of appearances. The family name, you know. The scandal. And so forth.

His wife detested him. Even if he wanted a divorce, which he did if it could be arranged quietly enough, she would never consent to it. She felt that such a course would give him pleasure. And that was the last thing in the world she wanted to grant him.

All this he explained to Ruth. He told her that he loved her and that he knew he had made a mess of both their lives. And then, being a great big he-man, he put the matter in her hands.

"What will we do?" he groaned.

Ruth didn't know much about life, even though she was learning fast. But she did know there was but one chance.

"There's only one thing we can do, dear," she said. "We'll have to throw ourselves on her mercy. We'll go to her and tell her the entire story. We'll tell her about the baby. She'll have to see it our way then. She couldn't be cruel enough to keep us apart."

Her lover shook his head sadly.

"It will never work, Ruth," he asserted. "You don't know what kind of a woman she is. I'm terribly afraid of what she will do when she hears about this. But it is, as you say, our only chance. God, what a mess." . . .

The wife was a cold, hard, biting woman. She had had no children. She could have no children. And as Ruth sat holding her husband's hand and unfolding the story of what had happened between them, the other woman's face set itself in rigid lines. She was one of those women who delight in torturing themselves by suffering in silence. But underneath there blazed a hate and an unquenchable desire to hurt these two as they were hurting her.

When the narrative was over, the pitiful child looked for an answer from the woman with a face like a mask. It soon came. And every word was smeared with hate.

"I will not divorce my husband," she said. "Neither you nor anyone else shall ever have him. That is final. And it will be final until the day I die."

Then, speaking slowly, she unfolded such a vengeful plan as you have seldom encountered. Surely the woman must have been just a little mad, for no sane person could have compounded such a scheme. Yet there it was.

The child was to be born and mothered by Ruth. At the age of one year it was to be turned over to the other woman. It would be raised and guarded as though it was the woman's very own. Through all this, Ruth was to be supported and well taken care of. At the end of the year, she was to be given a certain sum of money. And she was then to disappear.

"I must have your word," continued the woman icily, "that the child is to be mine. You must promise that if the child lives, it will never learn from you the true details of what happened. That is my one specific condition."

Her husband began to talk. But Ruth stopped him.

"And if I refuse to agree to such a fantastic bargain?" she asked.

The other woman smiled grimly.

"I will sue my husband for separation," she said, "and unfold the complete story. I will ruin him socially and in a business way. Your child will be branded as long as it lives. It's all very simple. Do I make myself clear?"

Ruth went home and cried herself to sleep. She was dealing, she knew, with a strange woman. A mad woman. But one who would certainly carry out every threat.

On the following morning her mind was made up. She loved her man, and she was doing this for him. And, weak as he was, he was going to permit it. She came before his wife and mumbled her answer.

The child was born. It was a boy. Ruth nursed the child. And caressed him. And loved him. Yet, when the year was up, she went through with her part of the bargain. She turned her boy over to the other woman.

"You'll—you'll be good to him?" she asked pitiably. "You'll please be good to him?"

"I will be good to him," replied the other. "But you must never forget the rest of the bargain. You are to go away and stay away. And this child must never know that I am not his mother. You will not forget your promise?"

Ruth looked down at her child. He was going to have everything in the world—except her. She turned abruptly away.

"You have my word," she murmured. And she left . . .

* * *

Up in Buffalo, a 21-year-old boy is today the head of a large corporation. His mother died when he was preparing to enter Harvard at the age of seventeen. And the business passed to him when his father died shortly after. The boy, of course, is Ruth's son. But he knows nothing whatsoever about the true story.

His foster mother had been more than kind to him. She didn't grow to hate him, as you may have suspected. Instead she grew to love him very dearly. She was a devoted mother, and there was no reason why he should ever suspect the truth.

Several months ago a new stenographer was employed by the office manager of the Buffalo plant. She was very gray and her eyes were very tired. She was much older than any other woman in the concern. But her work was satisfactory and they kept her on.

Ruth, of course. She had waited a long, long time. But she felt herself growing older and she could hold out no longer. She wanted to see her boy. To be near him. To look at him for the first time in all these years.

She found him, as the saying goes, the ideal American youth. He ran the factory very satisfactorily for one so young. He loved his football. He was certain that Joe Cook was funnier than Eddie Cantor and that Libby Holman could sing better than Helen Morgan. He had two or three girls whom he liked immensely and he played golf in the low eighties.

When he walked through the office this gray-haired woman made him sligtly uncomfortable. He felt her eyes upon him at all times. He never spoke to her and she never spoke to him. Yet she gave him the strangest feeling.

They came to him one morning and spoke about cutting down expenses. They gave him a list of employees and he went over it with a pencil. The first name he crossed out was that of the white-haired woman.

"I hate to do this to her," he observed, "but she's a little too old for us anyhow. Give her a month's salary instead of two weeks. And tell her we're very sorry. Now let's see who's next——" . . .

* * *

If you must have a finish to the story, you may find it in the fact that, when the police crashed a gas-filled room in a dingy Buffalo boarding house some days later, they found a gray-haired woman on a bed. She was dead. There was no note—and no word to her boy.

Ruth had kept her word. . .

LIV.

SHE DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT LOVE

THIS is hardly a typical story of Broadway. It couldn't be. There isn't a double-crossing dame nor a two-timing man in the entire piece. Could there really be a story of Broadway without such characters in it? It hardly seems possible. But we'll see.

The yarn concerns a girl who was in the Follies in the not so distant past. And when you don't hear any gossip about a Follies girl on Broadway, you can bet your last dime that that girl is on the level.

Sue was an ambitious kid. Where she came from and who her people were, I have no way of knowing. But she was, somehow, different from the rest of the kids in the Follies ensemble. There was always more reserve about her. More natural charm. And, perhaps, more ability.

This girl chose her spots. When she was playing in a show with Paul Whiteman, it was Paul to whom she turned for advice and counsel. When she was tossed into association with W. C. Fields and Will Rogers, she made certain that these men became her friends.

For she was a wise little lady. She knew that these men could some day help her more than all the stage door johns in the world put together. They could help her achieve her ambition to become a stage star on Broadway. . . .

* * *

In due time, just as it happens to all of us, Sue met THE man. You'll be slightly surprised when you learn who THE man was. I know that all Follies beauties are supposed to fall in love with millionaires. But this was one case — and I might name one or two others — where such was not the case.

THE man—let's say he was George—was a retired Army officer. George was old enough to have been Sue's father, and almost her grandfather. For Sue was in the neighborhood of twenty. And George had already passed fifty.

But how are you going to figure these things? The man had breeding and poise. He could talk and he had a vast amount of personal charm. Moreover, he was a perfect gentleman. He respected Sue — and he was vastly different from the men who were always trying to paw her. He was a welcome relief.

And so, after four or five meetings, Sue fell in love. George beat her by five meetings because he had fallen in love the very first time he saw her. But he had to wait. And wait he did.

Then, when he called for her at the New Amsterdam one night, he told her his story.

"Sue," he said. "I love you. It may be a hopeless love, but I pray to God that it's not. Please. Before you say anything, let me finish. Then, if you must, I'll go.

"I can't give you anything. You're young—and I'm growing older. You're little more than a child—and I'm far from that. You're in perfect health—and I know that I'm not."

She tried to speak. He stopped her.

"Please, dear," he went on. "I can't offer you money and I can't offer you youth. All I can give you is my heart and the love I bear you. Beyond that, I am beaten.

"Sue, I'm asking you to marry me. Perhaps it's a futile want, but I had to tell you. What is your answer?"

The girl stepped close to him. She held his arms.

"George," she responded simply, "it wasn't necessary for you to have said all that. I'm not like so many of these other girls. And I thank God for that. It may be that that's what attracted me to you.

"I'm looking for happiness, George. And I think you can help me find it. I want to remain on the stage because I think I can get somewhere. If you'll agree to that, I'll marry you.

"For I love you, George. More than you know."

You know the answer, of course. Sue and George were married. When she returned to work, the girls all crowded around and congratulated her. But they privately agreed that she had been a terrible fool. . . .

* * *

For three years, Sue and George were ideally happy. She respected her husband—and he loved his wife beyond all belief. They were true friends, these two. And that's a basis for a deeper union than all the passion in the world.

Sue was out of the Follies now. She was playing small parts in various productions. Sue's roles were by no means stellar. But she was learning. And she was happy.

George's health began to go. The war had left its mark on him. Doctors told him that he would have to leave for the west at once. And rather than tell the girl he loved the true state of affairs, he lied to her in a most believable manner.

"Honey," he told her one evening, "I have real news for you. I've had an offer of a job—a good job—in Denver. It will pay me much better than I'm doing now. I think I'll take it for a short time. What say, baby?"

Ever try to lie to a girl who loves you? Toughest thing in the world, my friends. Sue knew that George was lying. She knew the true reason why he had to go to Denver. She had seen it coming for some time. But did she tell him? Not that girl.

She threw her arms about him.

"Oh, George," she cried, "of course you can go. And I'm happy about it, too. Maybe I'll get a play soon that will take me out near Denver. Sure. And if not, we'll write to each other all the time and spill all the dirt.

"That'll be fun, honey. Sure, you can go."

A few days later, she kissed him goodbye. Both of them were laughing merrily as the train pulled out. And both of them were crying the minute their backs were turned. . . .

Sue was worried about her husband. She knew the state of his health and she knew that he had very little money to carry him through. So she pulled the strings as best she could. She knew where her husband was living because she heard from him by mail almost every day. And she finally fixed it.

She arranged matters so that George would be offered a job as the assistant manager of a Denver theatre. His duties were to be light—practically nothing. And for a good reason. She herself was to send the money for his weekly salary. And the regular manager was pledged to secrecy.

Soon there came a letter from George. It was typical of him.

"My own dearest," it read. "What do you think has happened? I'm in the show business now myself! Yes, sir. Couldn't let my little Sue get away with all the honors in the family.

"For some unknown reason, as I have already written you, my other job didn't pan out. And all of a sudden, from out of a clear sky, came an offer for me to manage one of the theatres out here. The money isn't very large—but I took it for the time being. Why not?

"So your husband is now a manager. You'd better not play this town because I'm liable to cancel you at any time.

I'm feeling fine and, aside from missing you, I'm very happy tonight.

"Write you more tomorrow. Be good, darling. And God bless you."

Sue read that letter time and time again. It made her happy—and yet it made her sad. She was paying her husband's salary and working hard to make both ends meet. Yet she was fairly contented.

Funny for her to have been a Follies beauty. And after all we've read about them, too. . . .

Let's draw the curtain over another year, which doesn't bring us many moons from the present time. Sue had progressed rapidly. She had been given a real chance in a fairly important production. And this was the opening night.

It would be nice, of course, to tell you that Sue stole all the honors from the star and that the audience rose in a body to cheer her. But that wouldn't be true. Sue merely acquitted herself very well. She would rate fine notices on the morrow. She had passed another milestone on the highway of success.

As she enacted her role, Sue didn't know that George was in the audience. She had not heard from him in several days and she had wondered why. For she had no way of knowing that he intended to be present on her opening night just to surprise her and hold her in his arms once again.

When the final curtain fell, George wended his way backstage. It took several minutes. At last he stood before her door. He knocked. She opened the portal and they fell into a long embrace.

As they sat down to talk, George noticed a letter. Sue had been writing. As she was busily engaged in removing her make-up, he looked at the envelope. A puzzled feeling came over him. Then a cold sweat. The letter was addressed to his boss, the manager of the Denver theatre.

His hand moved toward the letter. It was unopened. He shook it and a money order fell out. A money order for the amount of his salary. Suddenly the truth dawned upon him.

George stood up. He looked ashen. And tired. And old. Sue turned to him.

"George," she cried. "What is it? What's the matter, dearest?"

He passed a hand across his forehead. And he smiled. A wan smile.

"Tired, Sue, dear," he replied. "Long journey here, you know, and the thrill of seeing you again. I'll be downstairs, honey. Be downstairs waiting for you."

He stumbled from the room. And the next day Sue had a note.

"It was a wonderful thing you did for me," it said, "but I cannot go on like this. I have too much pride.

"Your life is still before you. Mine is behind me. Take the freedom I now give you and live your life to the utmost. And remember that I have always loved you."

And that was all . . .

* * *

Sue never saw her husband again. Nobody did. And the odds say that nobody ever will.

The girl had to go back to work. But there was something wrong with her. The sparkle was gone. She was dismissed from two plays during the rehearsal periods. Something had gone wrong somewhere. And people wondered. Because people didn't know what had happened.

It was only recently that she rehearsed a love scene in a new play. The director was peeved. There was something missing.

"Stop," he shouted. "Miss Sue, what's the matter with you? You don't seem to realize that the woman you're portraying is supposed to be in love. Do you understand? In love!

"What's the matter with you? Don't you know what love is?"

Sue shrugged her shoulders.

"No," she replied. "Maybe you're right. Maybe I don't know what love is." . . .

LV.

THE MAN WITH THE WILL OF IRON

MR. BURNS, patent attorney in a fairly large Pennsylvania town, had very definite ideas about life. He was a God-fearing man, and he never lost an opportunity to talk about it. Through the years, he had indulged in the extreme pleasure of talking about himself. He spoke about his strength of character, his great love for his family and his iron will. The neighbors believed him. And, more important, he began to believe it himself.

Mrs. Burns was a meek little woman who had been listening to her husband for twenty-five years. She knew all of his speeches and theories by heart. As a matter of fact, as the years drifted by, she learned just how to time her nods. Thus, while her husband talked, she had merely to nod every so often and to keep on with her sewing without listening at all.

There was but one child in this family—and Grace was nearing eighteen. Mr. Burns hadn't neglected her with his theories at any stage of the game. But now that she was going out with the boys and being a thoroughly normal girl of her age, Mr. Burns derived a great deal of pleasure from barking at her.

"Watch yourself," he counseled. "We live in a fool's age. There are but few of us good and God-fearing folks left. Your mother is one. I am another. You must be a third.

"Keep away from those talking pictures. They destroy the mind. If you must go out with boys, be sure that your mother approves of them first. Listen carefully to your father's words. Heed me—and you will live a life that will be free of sin."

Thus did the noble Mr. Burns belch away for hours at a stretch. He talked more and said less than any man in the world with the possible exception of Tom Heflin. Time after time Grace wanted to scream in his face and run from the house.

But, like her mother, she was afraid of this man. They feared this fool's reputation. The reputation that he was a man with a will of iron. . . .

* * *

Danny was the boy in the case. He was the best looking boy in the town—and probably the shyest. About twenty-three years of age, he had a good job in one of the local factories. He would never win any prizes for essays on the Einstein theory, but he did know Babe Ruth's batting average. All in all, except for his shyness, he was an extremely regular fellow.

His friends had known about this shy angle for years and they were forever attempting to frame him with a girl. The girls, it goes without saying, were only too anxious to be a party to the frame. But Danny refused to fall.

"I'll tell you how it is, fellers," he would explain. "I just can't warm up to these girls you pick out. All they keep saying is that I'm good looking and do I want to go out some place and dance?

"Those dames get my goat. Some day a real one will come along. Then you fellows will have your wish. You'll laugh yourselves sick about me. Because when I fall, I'm going to fall right.

"You just wait. And watch" . . .

Danny and Grace Burns had been made for each other. No question about that. They met at a party one night and both of them knew the game was up right then and there. Before an hour had passed they were head over heels in love.

This was the real thing all right. Both kids recognized the fact immediately. A few days later they were talking about marriage. That looked pretty far off, though. Danny was making a nice living for one. But it wasn't quite enough for two. And the guy who first said that two can live as cheaply as one was the world's champion liar.

While they were discussing the great marriage problem, Danny said something about religion. A great fear leaped into the girl's heart. She asked Danny his faith—and the fear became an actuality. They were of different religions.

Danny laughed at her.

"Why, that's silly, honey," he cried. "What difference does it make anyhow? I'll hop over to your religion if you want me to. I'll do anything you ask.

"As long as we're happy and in love, what the dickens is the difference? Look at Irving Berlin and his wife. Look at hundreds of others. That's an old-fashioned idea, darling. It's not going to make a bit of difference to us."

The girl shook her head. She knew what she was talking about.

"Not to us, Danny," she replied, "because we understand. But my father is a strange man. He will never give his consent to such a marriage. I can't even tell him about you, Danny. I can't."

And she didn't. For two months the daughter of Mr. Burns travelled around with a man who had never even been properly introduced to her mother. The girl knew that no real happiness could ever come to her with this boy because of her father. She knew it as well as though he was already scolding her.

But she could not let him go. Not Danny. Not the boy who meant everything in the world to her. She just couldn't.

And then her father found out. . . .

Ever meet a man like Mr. Burns? He was the kind of a bird who wrote anonymous letters. He enjoyed listening in on phone calls. He liked to pry into private matters that did not concern him. If you had told him that he was pretty much of a sneak, he would have verged on apoplexy. And he would undoubtedly have replied that, when he did something underhand, it was only because he was a God-fearing man. God must have had many a laugh as He looked down at this character.

At any rate, Mr. Burns found out about Danny and his daughter through an anonymous phone call. Some little girl, no doubt, who was jealous of Grace's success with Danny. No matter who it was, however, she did the trick in splendid fashion. When Grace arrived home that night, the war was on.

Mr. Burns didn't mince a single, solitary word. He made it all very plain.

"All my life in this great town," he roared, "I have been a respected and God-fearing citizen. People regard me highly. They look up to me. They say I have an iron will.

"And I have, by God. Do you think you're going to come along and ruin me by bringing some sacriligious fool into my house? You'll think again, young woman. You'll think again."

For an hour or so he pounced on similar words. And then sent home the final punch.

"You are never to see this man again!" he shouted. "You are never to speak to him. If you do, I will find out. And when I find out, I will kill the both of you.

"You have heard what I said. You will not bring shame upon your father's head. These are my final words." . . .

That night, Grace slipped from her home. She met Danny in a nearby park. And you can imagine their conversation far better than I can write it.

She told the boy exactly what had happened. He was stunned.

"Why should he want to ruin our happiness?" he wondered. "Why won't he give us a fighting chance? Why?"

The girl couldn't answer. They talked for awhile. And the girl said they would have to stay apart. There was no other way out. If there was, neither one could think of it.

She left him soon and went back home. Her father talked to her for another hour then allowed her to go to bed. Her mother merely nodded. . . .

A week later, the climax arrived. The girl could stand it no longer. She picked up the phone and called her Danny.

"Oh, darling," she cried. "I've got to see you. I love you so. I can't stand it any longer. He can't keep us apart. He just can't. He—"

That was as far as she got. The man with the iron will came through the door and pulled the phone from her hands. He struck her a heavy blow across the face. The girl fell to the floor.

"This ends it!" he screamed. "You're going to a correction house this week. I'm through with you. I can't keep you from your sacriligious friend, can't I? We'll see." . . .

Grace didn't go to a correction house. The charming Mr. Burns thought it over and decided that it would not do his reputation any good. So he did what he thought was the next best thing. He would send her to New York and let her earn her own living there.

Yes, that was the solution. The more he thought of it, the better he liked it. She would be away from this boy. He would send her to live in the home of a lawyer he knew in New York. She would soon forget that she had ever been in love with anyone outside of her own faith. And the people who heard the story would recognize the fact that Mr. Burns had indeed lived up to his reputation.

"A great man," they would say. "He even sent his own daughter away because of his great principle. Truly, Mr. Burns is a man with an iron will." . . .

So Grace was placed on a train and sent to the city of New York. All she knew about the big town was the stuff she had read in the papers. She knew about Peggy Joyce, and Peaches and Daddy Browning. All of which is hardly a complete education.

She learned quickly. Too quickly. Her heart had been broken into several million pieces. She didn't care much what happened to her now. And when you don't care what happens to you in our city you're liable to find yourself on an awful ride.

Grace took that ride. As a matter of fact, she's still taking it. She's only been in New York about two years. They know her very well around Broadway. They should. The men toss her around as though she were a football.

When she arrived in town, she wrote two letters to Danny. Then she stopped. Why? Who knows? She didn't worry about her life any more. She was going to make it a fast spin. And why drag Danny along with her?

I used to see this girl around the night clubs quite frequently. I didn't know her story then. It had to come to me from her own home town. But here it is.

Grace drank heavily when I saw her. She still does, I suppose. She looks more like thirty-five than twenty. And as for her male companions——

Well, there doesn't seem to be any limit to them. No limit—and no distinction. Gracie plays them all. She laughs about the situation. A hard laugh, but a laugh just the same.

Because she makes no secret of the fact that she is now a member of the oldest profession in the world. . . .

* * *

Down in that Pennsylvania town things are pretty much the same. Danny hasn't changed much since the day she left. He still goes around with her picture next to his heart. He has grown thin and he cries when he takes one drink. He thinks Grace is coming back to him some day. And maybe she will—in a box.

The man with the will of iron is still talking. Mrs. Burns is a trifle worried, but she's afraid to say much. And her husband pounds his fists whenever Grace's name is mentioned.

"I showed her," he cries. "She thinks she's getting even with me by not writing to us. But I'm not worried about her. She's in an office somewhere and earning her own living.

"Marry a sacriligious fool, would she? I broke that up. I showed her, didn't I?"

And the mother merely nods. . . .

FINALE

TRUE LOVE

(An Allegory in a Prologue, Three Acts and an Epilogue.)

TRUE LOVE

PROLOGUE

MONTGOMERY walked homeward with a smile on his face. He was a Good Man—and he had a right to smile.

What is a Good Man? The same today as He was sixteen years ago, which is when Montgomery walked homeward with that smile on His face. A Good Man has a Wife, a Home and a Child, if possible. A Good Man goes to Church on Sunday mornings, unless He has a little indigestion and would like to remain in bed.

A Good Man argues against Liquor but loves to get drunk. A Good Man thinks Prize Fights are brutal but goes willingly if tickets are free. A Good Man hates filth but revels in seeing and hearing it. A Good Man talks a lot and says nothing. A Good man will always tell you He is a Good Man. A Good Man is very dull.

Montgomery was going home an hour earlier today. He was anxious to be with His Little Daughter, aged two. He was anxious to be with His Wife, too. He was anxious to be with his Little Daughter because it made Him proud to think that she was His. He was anxious to be with His Wife because she had spent too much on Groceries that week and He wanted to give her Hell. The combination made Him very happy and caused Him to smile.

Across the hall from Montgomery lived an Artist. The Artist was not a Good Man. On the contrary, he was a Bad Man. What is a Bad Man? The same now as He was sixteen years ago. A Bad Man argues for Liquor and hates to get drunk. A Bad Man loves Filth but detests it in one for Whom He Cares. A Bad Man will always tell you He is a Bad Man. A Bad Man is just a shade duller than a Good Man.

Montgomery's wife had gone for the Bad Man. Ask Ward Greene or Gene Fowler or Ben Hecht or Tiffany Thayer to tell you why She was in the Bad Man's bed while Her Husband was climbing the stairs. They have more space and more ability to develop the whys and wherefores of feminine psychology. All I can tell you is that She was there because She didn't know Montgomery was coming home an hour earlier.

Can you guess what happened, Gentle Reader? You're damned right you can't. If you could, what sense would the whole thing have? Even less than it has now—which is plenty less.

Montgomery, the Good Man, walked into his apartment and found His Little Daughter sleeping peacefully. But where was His Wife? Being a Good Man, He naturally distrusted everyone. She should have been home now. Where—

The Little Daughter stirred in her Sleep.

"Mummsy," she muttered. "Uncle Muggsy. Fire engine. Mummsy."

Uncle Muggsy! The Good Man stood back. He was startled. Uncle Muggsy was the Artist! The Bad Man! Could it be possible that — —?

Montgomery stole along the corridor. He stopped at the door of the Bad Man's studio. Gently He tried the knob. The door was unlocked. Gently He opened the door. Gently He gazed in at an occupied couch. Gently He distinguished figures. Gently He closed the door again. And gently He slid to the floor in a faint.

When He awakened, the Good Man did not go forth in search of a gun. He knew too much for that. He had been reading Mr. Hearst too long not to know what happened to people who went forth in search of guns. Instead, He returned to His apartment, threw some clothes into a large grip and took his Little Daughter in His arms.

"Child," He said, "I love you. You and I are going far away from this City of Evil. Neither of us will ever see your Mother again.

"We are going to a Mountain Top. We are going to the highest Mountain Top in all the World. There you and I will live together—and we will live only for each other. We are going so Far Away that there will be no others."

The Good Man caressed His Little Daughter very tenderly.

"One thing I promise both You and Myself," he murmured. "You are going to grow up without knowing anything about Sex. Sex has ruined my Happiness. It is not going to ruin yours.

"Before God, My Little Daughter, I take this oath. You will never know the meaning of Sex."

As the Good Man carried Her from the room, the child howled mightily. It is doubtful if She understood the import of Her Father's words. Nevertheless, she howled. . . .

ACT ONE

The Good Man kept His word. With His Little Daughter in His arms, He travelled many weary days and nights. But He finally found a Mountain that suited Him. And there, on the very Top, he feathered a little nest.

As the years flew by, His Little Daughter became a Beautiful Young Woman. She was such a creature as would make Flo Ziegfeld forget his Follies. She would make strong men weak and weak men collapse. She had the limbs of a Claudette Colbert, the grace of a Noel Coward, the lips of a

Joan Crawford, the eyes of a Nancy Carroll and the hair of a Paul Ash. She was, in other words, the Nuts.

Yet, with all these charms, she knew nothing of Sex. The memory of that Hideous Night had remained always with the Good Man. He had sworn that this child would know nothing of Sex — and He had kept His word. The Beautiful Young Woman knew absolutely nothing. He never had to explain where babies come from for the simple reason that this child didn't even know what babies were.

They were happy, these two. They strolled around the Mountain Top and enjoyed the beauties of Nature. They plucked their food from the plants around them and their meals were always the berries. The Good Man gazed upon His Daughter and His Heart glowed. Such innocence. Such beauty. Such devotion. He had undertaken a Mission—and Success had crowned His efforts.

One morning. the blow fell. The Beautiful Young Woman had just passed Her Eighteenth Birthday. The Good Man was stretched upon the ground and wondering, while He was keeping His word, who was keeping His wife. Suddenly, from out of a thicket, came His Daughter.

"Daddy," she cried. "What is Love?"

The Good Man leaped to His feet. He was amazed. Amazed and frightened. How had the Child come to ask such a question? He stalled for Time.

"What is Love?" he repeated nervously. "Why, I—I—what makes you ask about such a Word as Love?"

The Beautiful Young Woman held up a portion of a Tabloid Newspaper.

"This paper blew along as I was walking," she explained, "and I picked it up. See what it says? 'Girl Says She Did It For Love.' I don't understand. What is Love, Daddy?"

The Good Man took His Child into His arms. As He held Her close, He looked at Her.

"Are you happy, My Child?" He asked. "Do you feel a certain Happiness when your Dear Father holds you in his arms?"

The Beautiful Young Child nodded eagerly.

"Oh, yes, Daddy. Yes, indeed."

The Good Man Sighed.

"That feeling, Little Daughter, is Love. It is the only True Love." . . . .

Act Two

The Good Man died.

It happened only a few weeks after He had explained True Love to His Daughter. He went to bed one night and complained of feeling Very Tired. A few hours later He groaned heavily and took a Good Long Sleep for Himself. Thus passed a Good Man to His rewards, if any.

The Beautiful Young Woman was all alone. She had no one now. Her Father was gone. There was nothing on the Mountain Top to hold her longer. So she decided to leave.

Down the Mountain she walked. She walked on and on and on. Day after day she travelled. And one morning, as the dawn came up, she saw before her a Village.

It was the Average Village. A few stores. A few Good Men. A few Bad Men. A little happiness. A lot of Hate. A few youngsters who were Yearning To Get Away From It All. A doctor who sold new pills to old pills. Good applejack and bad wives. The Average Village.

Before very long, the Beautiful Young Woman had a Job. She worked in the General Store—and the Old Buzzard paid Her sufficient for her needs. From the very first, it was evident that She knew Very Little. But the manner in which the Young Men flocked to buy things from Her was nothing less than a gosh-durn Shame.

The Old Buzzard went daffy about the Beautiful Young Woman. He passed a good many Cracks in her direction, but She didn't seem to know what he was talking about. He wanted to paw her, but he was afraid. When she passed him, he trembled all over. He desired the Beautiful Young Woman above all thing in This World. He was an Old Buzzard who was Flying High.

One day he asked Her to marry him. The Beautiful Young Woman was troubled. She spoke to the Girl next to Her.

"He wants to marry Me," she said. "What does that mean?"

"What does it mean?"cried the other girl. "Why it means that the Old Buzzard has fallen for you. It means that he's got to have you. It means that this whole store will be yours if you sleep with him long enough."

The Beautiful Young Woman was puzzled.

"Sleep with him? Why should he want me to sleep with him? I wouldn't be comfortable if I slept with him. What are you talking about?"

The Other Girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I never know when you're kidding," she observed, "but it doesn't make any difference. You'll have a cinch if you'll hitch up with him. Marry him."

So, a few weeks later, the Beautiful Young Woman and the Old Buzzard were verbally joined together. And that night, in the room he had fixed for her, the Old Buzzard advanced toward the Beautiful Young Woman. He clutched at her breasts—and the Girl gazed at him in bewilderment.

"What are you doing?" she murmured. "What is that funny look in Your Eyes?"

The Old Buzzard shook as though gripped by a Yen.

"That is Love," he muttered hoarsely. "That is True Love."

About ten seconds later, the Old Buzzard received such a Sock in the Nose that he was knocked almost into the next County. The Beautiful Young Woman leaped through a window and ran. And ran. And ran. . .

ACT THREE

In due time, because she was a fast runner and this is an Allegory, the Girl reached New York. Her limited experience had already taught her that, if She wanted to Eat, She must have a job.

Now it so happened that She had struck Hard Times. Many thousands of people were unemployed in New York City. But the Beautiful Young Woman didn't know that. So she went to a Department Store, applied for a Job——and received one immediately. They put her to work selling men's gloves. She didn't know the first thing about men's gloves, which is probably the reason they put her there.

She was worried. There was a Problem on her Mind. Twice she had come face to face with True Love—and twice the results had been disastrous. She wanted an Explanation, but from whom was it to come? She had no friends. She had no companions. She had never even seen a talking picture, the Lucky Stiff. She had —

"Have you this glove in a little darker brown?"

The Beautiful Young Woman looked up. Before her, She saw a Handsome Young Man. She looked into his eyes and felt suddenly strange. You and I understand that feeling, Reader of Mine, because we're a couple of Wise Babies. But the Girl didn't. This emotion was something new to her. It was the first time in her Life She had ever felt this way.

"That's the only shade we have in that glove," she said.

The Handsome Young Man smiled—and the Beautiful Young Woman smiled back.

"Thank you," he said. And he left. . . .

The next day, He was back again. And the day after that. And the day after that. On the fourth day, He escorted her to his Rolls Royce. And He took her to a Speakeasy, where the service was Fine, the food was Excellent and the liquor was just off the Ferry-boat.

As they dined, the Girl talked. She told Him something of Herself. The Young Man found it hard to understand Her. Yet He listened carefully and drank in every word. He gazed deep into her Eyes and saw that She wanted him. Not for nothing did He realize that He was a Handsome Young Man.

Before He permitted Her to leave, He kissed Her madly.

"I love you," he whispered. "I can't live without you. I will give you the keys to my apartment. Will you come there tomorrow night?"

The Beautiful Young Woman looked surprised.

"Of course I will," She replied. "I will do anything you ask. I feel so Happy when I am in your arms." . . .

The following day was the poet's delight. The minutes were hours, the hours were days. The Girl could not think. She could not work. She was so dizzy that when a customer came in for a pair of yellow gloves, size six, she sold him a pair of yellow gloves, size six.

At last the day was over. With Joy in Her heart, she left the Department Store and stepped into a Taxicab. She gave the address to the driver and sang to Herself as the cab bounced on. Soon She would be there. Soon She would be with him. Soon She would be in His arms.

At last! The house. She walked to His Apartment. She inserted the key in the lock. With a glad cry, She entered. Then She stopped. The place was Empty.

On the piano, she found a Note. A short Note.

"I Love You," it read. "And it's because I Love You that I cannot do this Thing to you. I am married—and there is no chance for us to find Happiness together.

"This is the first time in my life I have ever done such a thing. In the Eyes of the World, I am probably a fool. But you, at least, will know. You will know that My Love is a True Love." . . .

The Beautiful Young Woman felt that She had reached the end of the road. Three times She had heard the explanation of True Love—and three times She had found unhappiness. Now She would seek no longer. With the Handsome Young Man had vanished all her hopes and all her Desires. She no longer had a Will to Live. She decided to kill Herself.

She left the Apartment and taxied to the 125th street ferry. She stepped on a Boat and stood quietly against a rail as the vessel bounced its way across the Hudson. It was foggy out this Night. The ferry's whistle blew frequently. Two short blasts.

"True Love," it seemed to be saying. "True Love. True Love. True Love."

The Beautiful Young Woman was going to jump over a Cliff. That, it seemed to Her, was the proper way to commit Suicide. There were many steep cliffs in the Palisades. All her Life, except for a very short time, she had lived on a Mountain. That she should die from one was only fitting.

The ferry docked. She began to climb. Up she went. Further and further and further. Higher and higher in the Palisades. Across the river, the Lights of New York blinked drunkenly. Up. Up. Up. She veered sharply to her right and looked down. She knew that she was High Enough.

The Beautiful Young Woman closed her Eyes. This, then, was the end. One more step —

"True Love," she cried aloud. "You are the Great Mystery. I have tried to understand You. But I have failed. Perhaps now I will know your real meaning."

From far below came a Voice. It was a soft and soothing Voice. There was Melody in that Voice. The Girl listened. So, too, would you had you been there to hear it. It was the Voice of a Preacher. A man of God. There must have been Sin in his Congregation because he was talking to his Flock on a Street Corner. And his voice carried far.

"When it comes Time to meet the Lord," He was saying, "You have naught to fear. For the Lord hath Understanding. When You are about to die, go to Him willingly. For then—and only then—will you know True Love." . . .

EPILOGUE

The Beautiful Young Woman didn't kill herself.

She went back to New York on the next ferry and became a chorus girl in a Minsky Brothers' Burlesque Show. . . .

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